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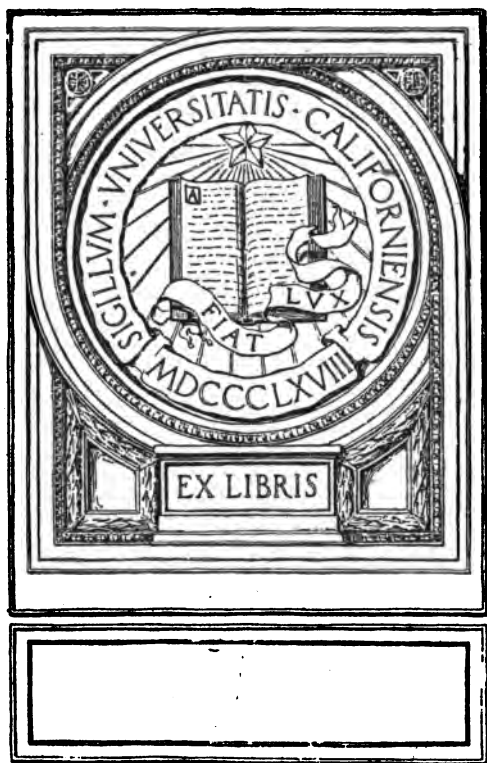
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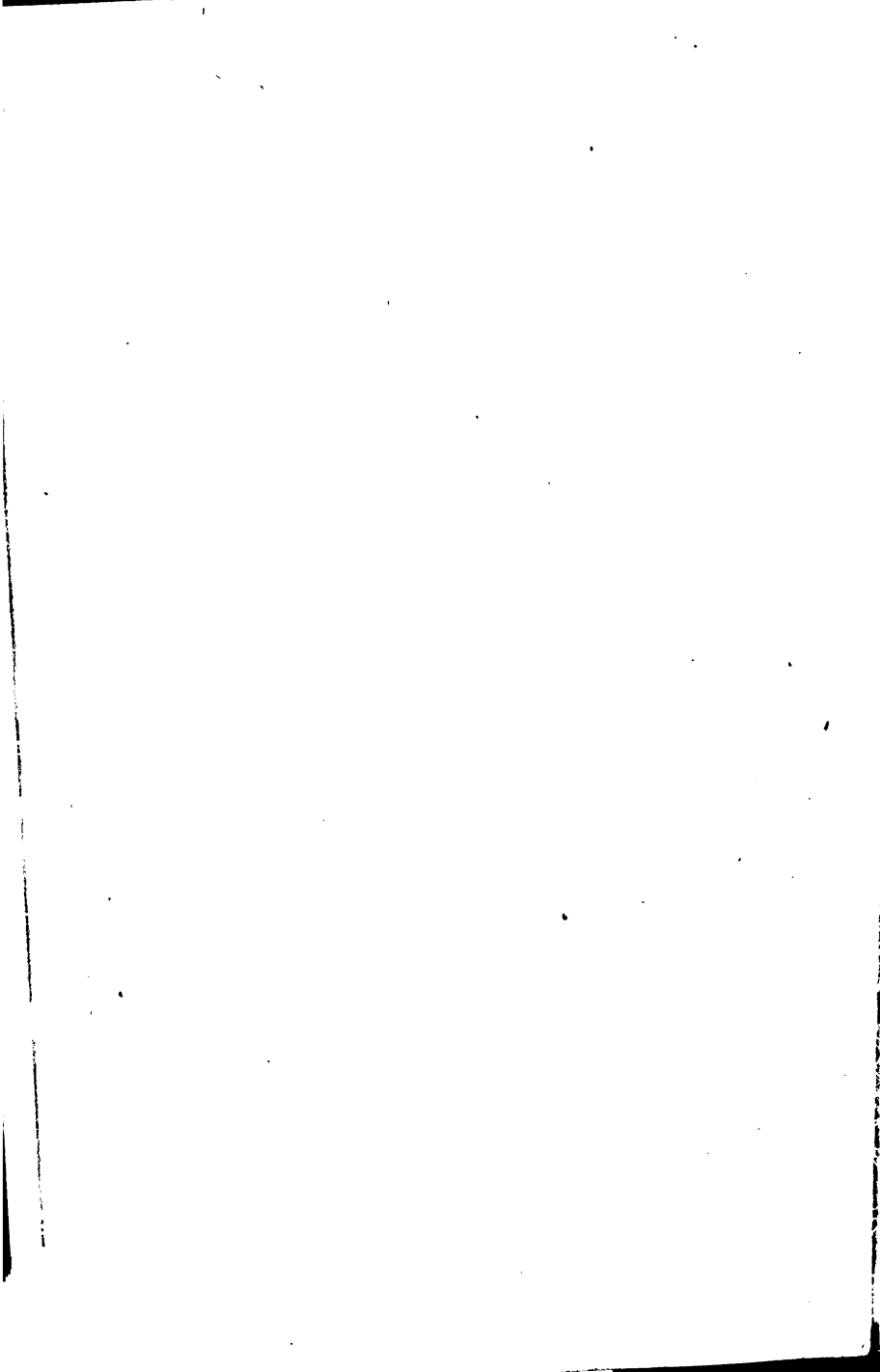
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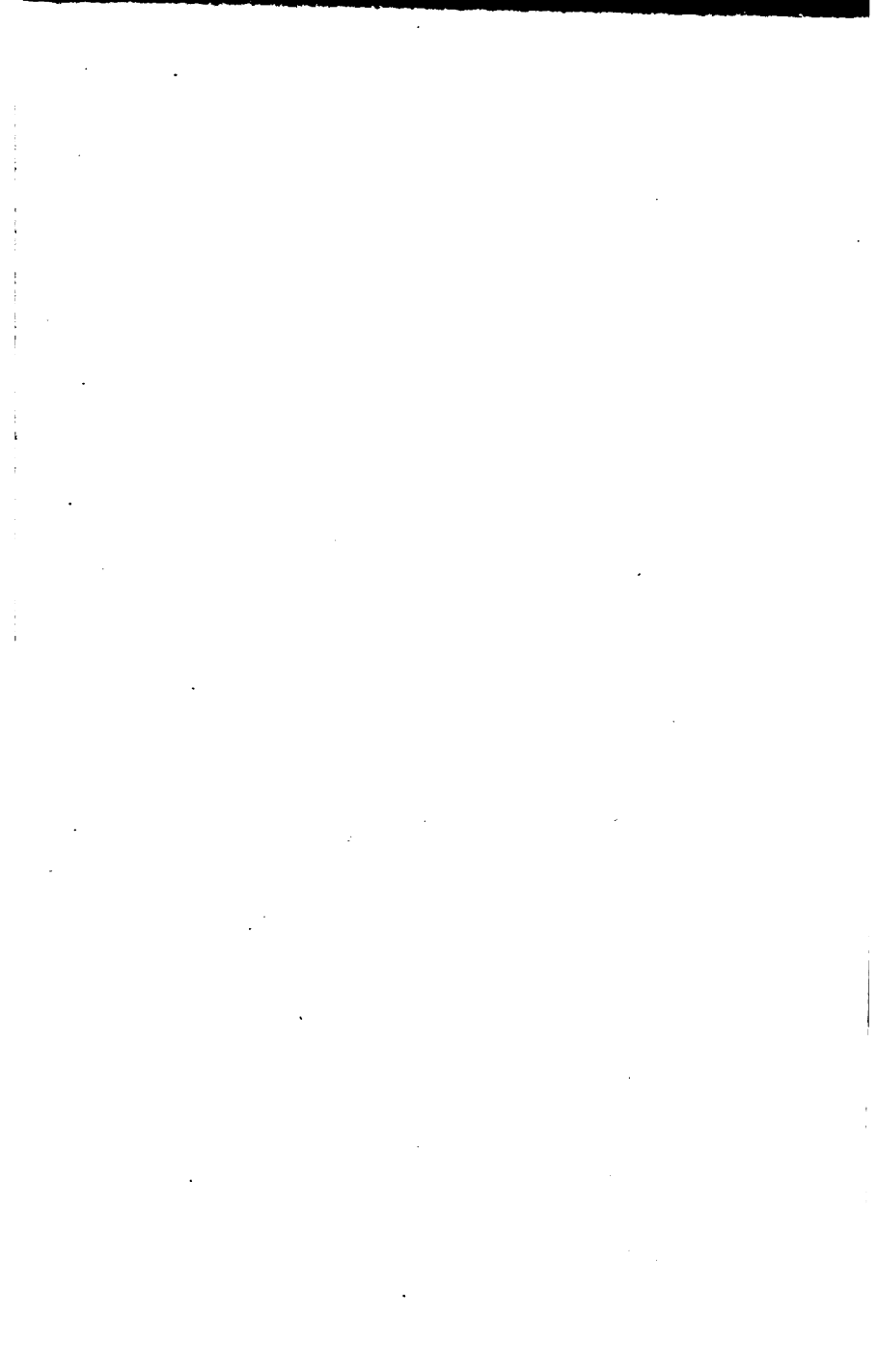
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NEAR KATOOMBA, BLUE MOUNTAINS.

The Story
OF
Australian Exploration

BY
R. THYNNE
||

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS AND A MAP



LONDON
T. FISHER UNWIN
1894

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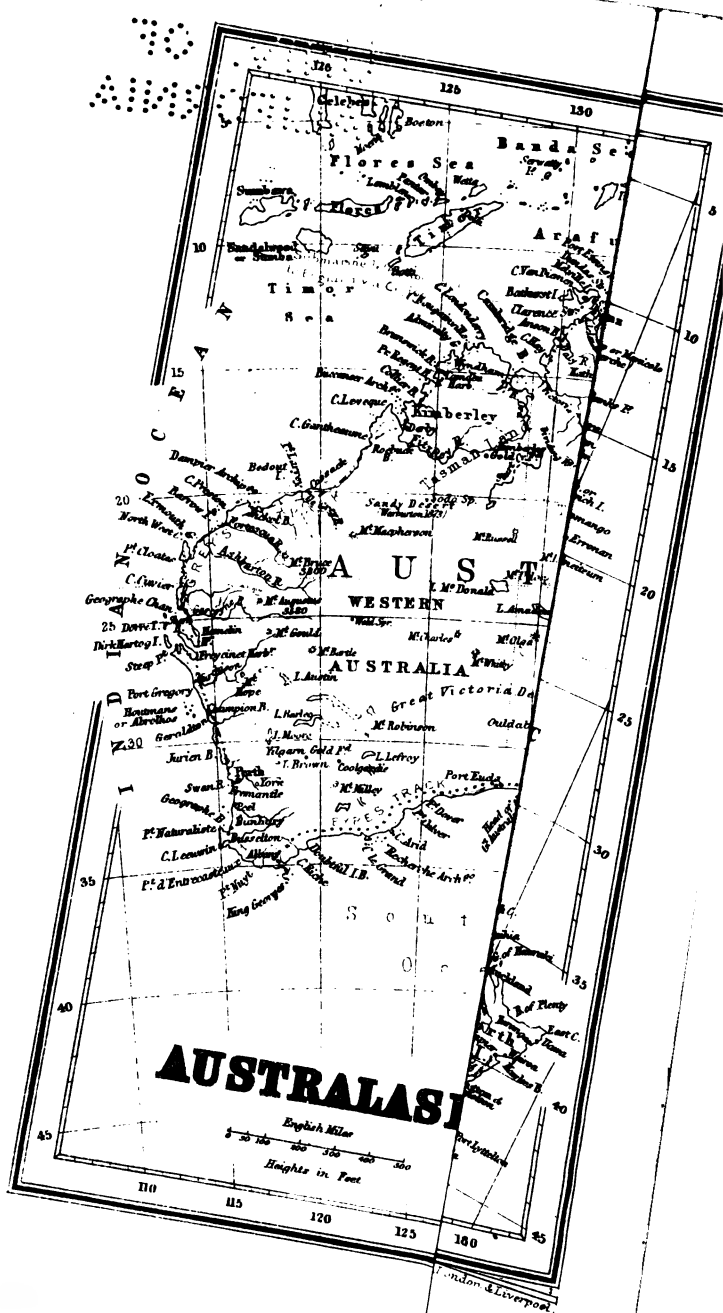
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THE STORY OF AUSTRALIAN EXPLORATION.



CHAPTER I.

AN EXPLANATION.

THOUGH brought up to the sea, I have more to say about land than water. My father bound me to a whaler, and away we went, on a three years' trip, to the great Southern Ocean. That is how I come to begin the following story of a boy's adventures in Australia. For, when the year's whaling season was over, it became our custom to put into Sydney to refit, and it was in one of these lying-by spells that I found my true vocation. Because, if ever there was an inveterate old explorer—always in an humble and subordinate way—I do believe I am that man, and no leader of an Australian expedi-

TO VINU ABODOLLAO

tion ever thought his party complete unless he had Billy Boffin somewhere on his list. And yet it was by the merest accident I found my real bent, as I now proceed to explain.

Of course, you are to understand that I am not a boy now, and the Sydney I am referring to was not the place it is at the present time, for I am carrying myself back a matter of fifty years and more.

Not but the place would surprise you, even then. In fact, only for the blue sky over it, and the lovely orange groves creeping round the grandest bay in the world, you might say you were in a thriving English town. The Governor had a fine brick house to himself. There were gay shops too—"stores" we used to call them. But most of the townspcople had to put up with log huts—"wattle and dab" we used to call *them*. That does not seem very English-looking, you will say. No, I am rather alluding to the bustle and the business of the place. You might hardly believe it, that a lone spot—the only spot within thousands and thousands of miles of it where a white man lived—should have all this "go-a-headism" about it.

Stranger still, it wasn't the sheep and the wool, which came after. And, of course, it wasn't the gold, which, after the sheep and the wool, made

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THE BLUE MOUNTAINS.

this settlement, as well as half a dozen other later Australian settlements, famous all over the world. No, as I said before, this was one little spot—a *very* little spot, as I'm now going to explain—on the borders of an unknown region nearly as large as Europe, and the *cattle* we looked after roamed through quite different pastures. So, instead of sheep and wool, you'll have to put down whales and oil, and then you'll have the Sydney I'm now going to start from.

Now, perhaps you'll say, "Why didn't such 'go-a-head' people make use of the land?" Well, that brings me slap into the middle of my story. Bless you, there was no land! Right behind the town of Sydney were the Blue Mountains, and no white man had ever crossed *them*! Not but there was trial after trial. The Government surveying fellows were always pottering about these mountains, and other people too, for the matter of that, for there was a tidy reward offered to any one who could discover a pass through them. There they spent month after month, clambering up and down their craggy sides, peering into their dark fissures and sunless streams, and following out labyrinth after labyrinth until they just came back to where they started. No Pass could be found. One surveyor, I'm told, concluded his report to the Governor with

the commendable remark that he "thanked God he had got out of it with his life."

Naturally, as a boy and a sailor, I hadn't taken much interest in that sort of thing. If the colonists scented these sheep pastures and cattle runs before they were accessible, we of the blubber and black-oil business did not. But none of us know very well what is before us—and this is how I accidentally came across my future walk in life.

A fine summer's day was drawing to a close, when the skipper of our whaling vessel sent me on a message about a mile out of the town. In these regions, when day closes night begins; and, for that reason, if for no other, I was hurrying back as soon as I had done my errand. Well, I had another reason. It appeared to me, as well as the gloom would allow, that some one was following me, though unable, or unwilling, to come quite up with me. At length, he gave up following me with his legs, and pitched his voice after me instead. "Hi! mate," I heard, that being the usual style of Australian salutation. Now, I *knew* this wasn't a ghost, but I was a bit nervous nevertheless. For, as you may have heard, the convict depôt of Botany Bay was just beside the town of Sydney, and prisoners were escaping from time to time. In fact, one had broken out a week before after undergoing punish-

ment for some offence, and it wasn't long before I discovered that I had come across this very identical *gentleman*. The depôt contained some of the greatest desperados in the world, but I really don't think this was one of them.

"Hi! mate," he repeated, as soon as he crawled a bit nearer to me. Then, as he got a better look at me, and in something like a tone of disappointment, he said, "Oh! it's only a boy."

"Yes, sir, I'm only a boy," I replied, thinking it my best policy to be civil.

"Well, perhaps it's all the better. I'm dead-beat, and hungry. You hav'n't got anything to eat with you?"

"No, I've not got anything to eat, here. But I have no doubt I could bring you some food from the town." I thought I would leave him no excuse to eat *me*.

"I tell you I'm *starving*—and you want to hook it."

"I don't." And I didn't. Though I say it as shouldn't, the Boffins were always plucky, and I was not afraid now. Then I added—"I was sent on a message, and I ought to be back by this. If I say I'll bring you food, I will. There's always plenty of grub knocking about our place, and I can bring you some even without asking a question."

I said this as it was already dawning on my mind that my gentleman was on his keeping, and did not wish any unnecessary observation drawn toward him.

He paused a moment, and then said, "Lad, I'll trust you—how soon?"

After some parley, I passed my word to come back that evening. It was only a stone's throw outside the town, and I knew in an hour or so there would be a moon, which would nearly turn night into day.

I kept my promise—and the moon kept hers. Talk of Italian or Arcadian moons! Ah, give me Australian moonlight in the calm, quiet "bush"! and at that time, and for years and years after, when you left the town you stepped right into the bush. But description is not my forte, and I've got plenty of real work before me, so I'll skip the moonshine, and proceed.

I had no difficulty in getting plenty of meat and bread—I knew I would not when I made the promise. I spied a half-bottle of rum in one of the bunks, and I asked a messmate for it. "You young rascal," he says, "you *are* beginning early—only mind you share it." If you'll believe me, I had never tasted rum in my life, though, at times, it was going like ditchwater, and I wasn't minded

to begin then. No, the poor miserable devil I was going to help had taken a sort of hold on me, and I thought I would set him up again.

He eyed the rum, as I came up, with a satisfactory look, but he was *that* hungry that he fell to at the food first.

Fortunately, he had the use of his jawbones, for, as to his hands and feet, they were cut and torn, and when he moved he winced as if his back was sore too.

Nevertheless, when he had filled his stomach, and taken a pull at the rum, he was almost cocky.

"The world doesn't know it's great men, lad. It's in the Governor's house I ought to be, instead of sitting under this here gum-tree. Now, what do you think I was punished for?" And he gave another wince with his back.

I professed my ignorance.

"I showed that same Governor some gold."

"Gold!"

"Ay, boy; the land is full of it. I and a chain-gang were working on the roads, and I found it.

"What did the Governor say?"

"Hé said it was land, not gold, the settlement wanted; and if I told any one else, he would punish me. Well, he did punish me."

"And then you—ahem!—left the dépôt?"

"That's about the size of it. I could give them land now, but I won't."

"Then you have found your way across the Blue Mountains?"

"Right you are again, lad."

"Perhaps you'll excuse the remark, but I think you let your—well, feelings get ahead of you. The Governor may be right, or he may be wrong, about the gold. But a Pass across the Blue Mountains is a different thing. You know there is a reward offered for that?"

"I've heard as much. Do you think I'd get the reward?"

Then I began to see that, like a good many other gentlemen of his antecedents, he was a bit of a bounce. He had partly made up his mind to tell of his discovery of the Pass, and take his chance of the results. But he could not resist his nature to try on the indignant, even before me—a boy.

Finally, I arranged to meet him at the same place in the morning, and then we were to feel our way with the authorities on the subject.

There was no difficulty at all in the matter. My friend got his reward, and got his liberty too. Our vessel left Sydney shortly after this; but I

heard that he turned a rather respectable sort of citizen. Anyway, he took the Governor's view about the gold, and kept his own counsel. To be sure, his liberty may have been made conditional on that. So that most people now think that gold was not discovered in Australia until Mr. Hargreaves, thirty-six years after, made known the fact. I cannot even give the name of this earlier discoverer. I met him again, and so will my readers if they will accompany me through the following pages. I only knew him as Gentleman George. When persons were allowed out of the dépôt at Botany Bay, their names and antecedents were always kept secret. They were hired out to the settlers, and were known as "servants of the Crown," with the addition of some such sobriquet as was now to distinguish Gentleman George.

CHAPTER II.

BEYOND THE BLUE MOUNTAINS.

WHEN our vessel again returned to Sydney, the change was indeed wonderful. Business, and even bustle, there had been before, but I can only describe what I saw now as business and bustle gone mad. The Pass which had been discovered through the Blue Mountains was found to lead out into a succession of lovely plains and downs, clothed with herbage. All the available sheep and cattle around Sydney were immediately bundled off to these pastures, and there arose a perfect mania for more live stock. Everybody in the settlement—skippers, lawyers, clergymen, even the Governor himself—went slapdash into sheep-farming. New settlers, too, came out in shoals. Europe was searched for the best breeds of sheep. There was a roaring trade done in importing stock of all kinds. For a time, all went merry as a

marriage-bell. Then came the hitch, which brought Exploration to the fore.

To understand this, let me tell you a few words about Australia in general.

Very lovely is its spring. The green grass waves ; the beautiful, clear streams murmur ; plain after plain expands before you, dotted here and there with park-like clumps of evergreen trees. Then expands the summer. The green grass turns to brown hay ; the hay turns to snuff ; a hot blast or two from the great Interior whirls it away, and leaves the land bare indeed. The streams dry up ; nothing remains but a chain of muddy ponds to mark the course they took. Gradually even these muddy ponds disappear, and nothing is left except the baked, cracked mud. Then has the flock-owner a bad time of it. He hurries his sheep from pond to pond, but they strew the dusty bush track with their carcasses.

Now this was the lesson which the settlers around Sydney were learning for the first time, after their mad fit of stock-buying and stock-farming. Many had invested their all in the possession of these live stocks. The prices had been what I fear my readers would regard as quite fabulous. I say nothing of the spirit of gambling, for that was really what had taken hold of the settlement. I

write merely of the actual flock-owners who had gone beyond these Blue Mountains, expecting a second Arcadia, and meeting the difficulties and disasters I am referring to.

In fact, the situation was this. All the best—that is, most permanent—streams had been taken up by settlers and their flocks. Unless more available land, permanently watered, could be found, it was clear that Australia was not to become a big sheep-farm after all.

Well, these settlers were true Britons, though so many thousands of miles away from the land to which they owed their indomitable energy. Australia was a very large place—the mere outline of the coast told them that. The game was not to be given up until they had inquired further. Their advance beyond the Blue Mountains was the merest trifle when compared with the vast and unknown regions which stretched away through the Interior, and, beyond the Interior, far into the Tropics. Until something was known about these vast tracts, despair was premature.

My readers may consider these remarks as digressive. But I want to bring before them how it came to be that Exploration took a first and foremost place in the mind of every Australian settler. From the time of which I now write, it

was no longer a merely curious subject of inquiry—no longer merely a scientific subject. The explorer came to be the pioneer of every fresh settlement; his doings were watched with the keenest and closest attention, and the results of them made available by the prompt and eager persons who waited for them.

In the first place, these Government surveyors, whom I have already alluded to, were put on a new tack. Their new instructions were always to be on the look-out for rivers, to observe their courses, and get at something like the water system of the country. The rivers now became as great a puzzle to them as the Blue Mountains had been previously. Such a water system no man had heard of before. All streams ran inland. When least expected, they suddenly came to a dead stop, leaving no visible channel or watercourse beyond. One surveyor found them to contain excellent drinking water. Another came back to Sydney and said the very same streams were as salt as the ocean. Mr. Oxley, who was the Surveyor-General of the settlement, returned with a story of his own. He had hit upon the two largest rivers found yet, to which he had given the names of the "Lachlan" and the "Macquarie." He had traced these to their junction; and what do you think he

had found there? Why, this junction spread out into a vast reedy lake, and he could not proceed any further without boats. When Mr. Oxley told this story, the mystery of the Interior was supposed to be as good as solved. Nobody had any doubt now that the centre of Australia would be found to be one vast lake or inland sea, into which all the streams emptied themselves.

Now, it was this imaginary lake or inland sea which brought your humble servant on the scene, so to speak.

I mind the day well, and the year, too, for the matter of that—it was in 1829. A military-looking gentleman came down to the harbour, where our skipper was putting us through our facings over some untidiness he saw, or fancied he saw, in the state of the vessel. Our visitor was what he looked, an officer and a gentleman, every inch of him. He was Captain Sturt of the 29th Regiment, then quartered in Sydney: a name ever to be respected throughout the Australian colonies, the father of Australian exploration, and, I am proud to add, my revered master and leader. He was about to start to explore Mr. Oxley's "inland sea," and he came to provide himself with a couple of boats. Having suited himself to his satisfaction, he threw his eye on me.

'Can you handle an oar, youngster?'

Of course I could.

"My complement of men is made up," he continued, turning to the skipper, "but if you can spare the lad for a couple of months or so, we'll give him the boat gear to take charge of."

The skipper had just told me, and the rest of the crew, for the matter of that, that we were wholly unsuitable to be entrusted with the charge of anything, and my heart was in my mouth lest he should repeat the observation.

However, he did not, and so it was arranged I was to go with Captain Sturt and his men.

It didn't take us even the two months; for, on sailing down the Macquarie to the point marked on Mr. Oxley's chart, neither sight nor sign of his "inland sea" was to be seen. In fact, as we were sailing beautifully along a wide and deep water-course, bump comes the boat against a stiff bank of clay—and then all was a dry expanse of level country beyond. The reeds were there, certainly; but though, leaving the boats, we advanced as far through them as it was at all advisable to go, not a drop of water could we get to wet our parched lips with.

What was to be done now? A couple of old bushmen in the party said they had heard of a

very large river to the north of our track. The information was vague and doubtful enough, still our leader determined to make a dash for it. The bushmen were right enough. After toiling under a fierce and burning sun, through a perfectly arid tract of country, we surmounted a slight rise to behold a sight I can never forget. There, almost under our feet, lay a noble expanse of water, fully eighty yards broad, and literally covered with various kinds of aquatic birds, of every imaginable plumage.

"We'll call it by our Governor, 'the Darling,'" says Captain Sturt, and we christened it with a shout. Then the men ran down the hill, and threw themselves on their faces to drink in the much-needed water.

In a moment a shout of a very different kind went up—the water was as salt as the ocean.

Regrets were vain, further delay impossible, and with a great effort we got ourselves back again to fresh water, and so to Sydney.

CHAPTER III.

OUR FIRST REAL EXPEDITION.

OUR last failure hardly amounting to an expedition at all, the next was to be an out-and-out one, and I was booked for it.

I don't know how it is, but let a man come back ever so dead-beat, after a little recruiting he is ready for all the hardships over again.

Our leader had been buried in thought all the way back to Sydney. He was trying to work out the problem of Australian geography, and to get hold of a theory. Presently I heard what his theory was, or rather *over*-heard it, for it wasn't likely he'd explain it to me in particular. His idea was this : Might not Australia be shaped like a cup, or rather saucer, with the high lands all round near the coast, and the central portions level and low ? If so, these rivers, coming down

from the coast ranges, and making for this Interior, would lose their briskness when they entered upon a flat stretch of country, and thus be stopped by the first serious impediment. The Macquarie, you recollect, we found stopped by a bank of stiff, tenacious clay. At times it got over this, and spread out in the form of a lake or marsh, as when Mr. Oxley saw it. At other times it did not, as when we followed it. But then, again, what became of the devastating floods which, by this time, the colonists in the settled districts were getting accustomed to? Here all was mere conjecture. They came and did their work of devastation, and passed away as rapidly as they had come. Some said there was an amazing evaporation going on in the Interior. Others as positively asserted that this inland sea would yet be found, if we could go far enough.

Captain Sturt's point was this: Nothing was to be done without water; as soon as that failed, an exploring party had to make for the coast as best it could. The ordinary sluggish streams were not to be depended on; in time they became mere canals, and might stop altogether. As to the floods, their appearance and disappearance were equally quick and uncertain.

Now, one feature of Australian geography had

already become sufficiently known. From the extreme north of the island-continent down to the southern settlement at Sydney, that is—all along the eastern coast, a distance of over two thousand miles as the crow flies—there extends a mountainous range growing higher and higher as the settlement itself is approached. At the back of Sydney, I have already introduced it to my readers under the appellation of the Blue Mountains, which are really a portion of this immense coast range. But as the range passes more south still, it rises to its highest proportion, and had acquired the name of the Australian Alps.

Down these Australian Alps tumble a thousand streams, fed by their snows, all turning westward, and all uniting in one impetuous and headlong channel, rejoicing in the native term of the Murrumbidgee. If force and fury could carry a river into the Interior, the Murrumbidgee was the one, and only one, to try that venture upon. In fact, those settlers who were already occupying shecp-runs along its never-failing banks, reported that it was making gallantly for the Interior, and showed no signs of abatement.

Now, Captain Sturt had made up his mind to proceed along the banks of the Murrumbidgee

wherever it went, and see what would come of the experiment.

I don't think he had much faith in this theory of an inland sea. Nevertheless, at the solicitation of a friend, he provided himself with one of our largest whaleboats, which came to play a prominent part in the performance, as you shall presently hear. This was taken to pieces, and packed on one of the drays. It was brought in case of an improbable emergency, and did not take up much room on the dray. As for ourselves, we were all to travel on shanks' mare. In fact, the account we got of the Murrumbidgee, with its fierce rapids, and deep, almost subterraneous gorges, did not lead us to look forward to much boating pleasures, though we had our fill of them before we were done.

On a delightful summer's morning we cleared out of Sydney, forming a long and even imposing line of march. To be sure, we had half the town to wish us God-speed on our way. Australians make any excuse for a holiday ; not from laziness, very far from that. The climate is fine and enlivening, and they work all the harder after such occasional relaxation. Then, besides, there was this spirit of enthusiasm in exploring efforts I have already referred to, under which every one looked

forward to "fresh fields and pastures new." And somehow it was remarkably exhibited on this occasion. Why, I don't know, except coming events have an influence of their own. For certainly no event left a deeper mark on the history of Australian settlement than that which I am now about to narrate.

We struck the Murrumbidgee for the first time at Yass Plains, about three hundred miles from Sydney. The river was all that the settlers had promised, and was proof, too, of their sound judgment in having selected its banks for their sheep-runs. The stream here was about one hundred and fifty feet wide, flowing through the loveliest regions I had yet made acquaintance with. It was my first view of the beauties of the Interior, and, looking back through a pretty long life of changeful scene, I don't know that I have yet met better of its kind, though it has been my lot to encounter much of an opposite character.

The course of the river itself was marked by the largest and tallest gum-trees I had hitherto gazed upon, while its banks, ever and anon, expanded into a succession of rich and deep "flats," where the more lowly but graceful acacias drooped over the abundant pasturage, filling the whole neighbourhood with their perfume. Acacias, of course,

I had seen before, plentifully enough—they were the “wattles” of which the early settlers constructed their houses. But these were peculiar, belonging to the class known as *acacia pendula*. As to the gum-tree—I suppose I ought to write “eucalyptus”—there is nothing graceful about it wherever met. There is always the same array of short, crooked, *crumpled* arms going everywhere; always the same white, *staring* bark, looking as if the tree had no bark at all, and had been carefully stripped of that essential to vegetable existence. Still, when the gum-tree is very large, as here, it has a certain grandeur of its own, being always in leaf, and always throwing a most acceptable shade on the ground below.

At Yass Plains we were joined by Mr. McLeay, son of the Colonial Secretary, who was to accompany the expedition, being, in fact, second in command under Captain Sturt.

I should have previously added that I was rather surprised to find my especial friend, Gentleman George, also a member of the party, though, I need hardly say, in a more subordinate capacity. And yet there was no occasion for surprise at all. Such “servants of the Crown” were universally taken on hire by the settlers, and there was more than one of them in this very expedition. I

suspect my friend had spent his "reward," or the most of it, and was glad enough of the berth. Spite of his occasional big talk, he made himself willing and useful. And as for the talk, the time came when he wanted his breath for other purposes, as you may hear hereafter.

A few days' travel along the banks of the Murrumbidgee brought us as far as settlement had yet extended. Nor was there any possibility of misunderstanding the reason, unacceptable as it might be. The country was decidedly falling off in fertility and pleasantness. The deep, dark, *black* soil of "the flats" was changing to a loose, dry sand, most toilsome to pedestrianism, while, as for the drays, they sank up to their axles, requiring the whole force of the party, horse and foot, to get them under weigh again.

Nor did the difficulties end here. Gradually also deserted us our graceful wattles and gum-saplings—for when the gum-tree is young it looks pretty enough, growing in clumps, and dotting the landscape with its thick, dark-green aromatic leaves. These were now succeeded by patches of "scrub," or dense prickly thicket, growing up to the river's bank, and even down to the water's edge. So very dense and matted is this scrub that a lane had to be repeatedly cut through it

with hatchet and saw, for the passage of the drays.

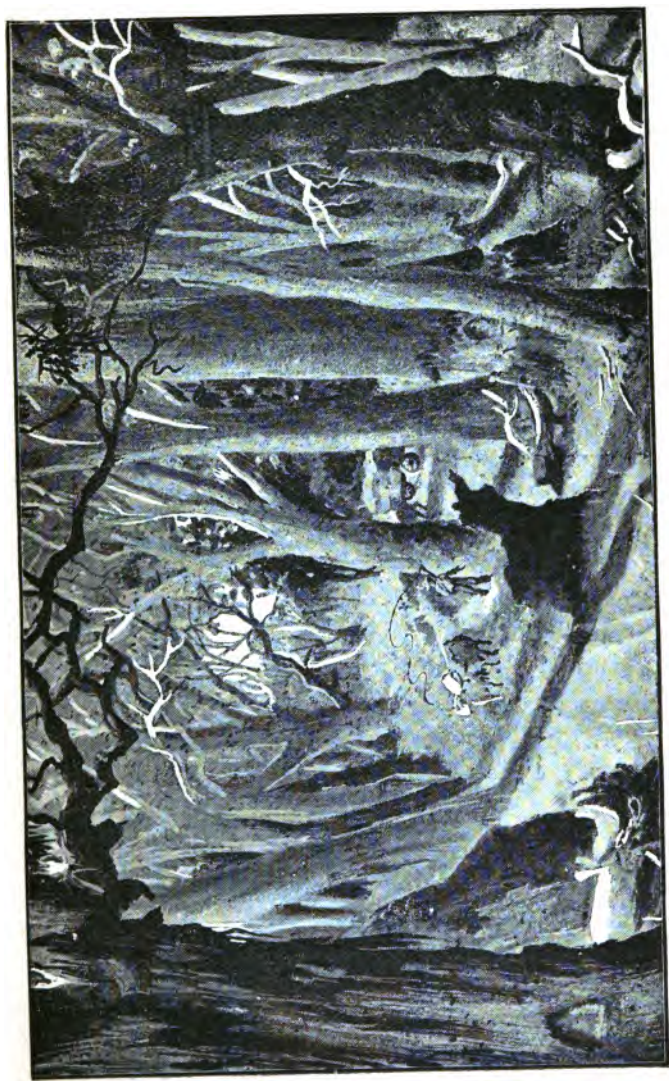
The men worked with a will, and no murmur was heard, though each day brought its further increase of toil. There lay the river before us, still lined with its attendant gum-trees, still pointing with unerring current to the much-coveted Interior. From the tops of the highest trees the tidings were still the same. On and on went the river, and always for the Interior.

So far the will made the way. On the seventh day of our journey from Yass Plains, it became apparent that the task was becoming a hopeless one. The drays could be moved no further, and, late at night, the men turned in, dead-beat and silent. But it was the silence of confessed defeat.

Nor was there word or comment from our commander. It was plain that a new plan had to be devised, and that we should hear about it in the morning.

With the first morning's light Captain Sturt and Mr. McLeay left the camp, taking their way along the gum-lined river. We anticipated a long reconnoitre, and were surprised by their return about mid-day. But the plan was all arranged, and straightway declared.

The bulk of the party was to return to Sydney.



THROUGH THE BUSH.



Six only were to be retained, under the command of Captain Sturt and Mr. McLeay. The whale-boat was to be put together again, and a smaller boat, or raft, for the stores, was to be constructed out of the drift-wood, which plentifully lined the banks of the river. When all these arrangements were complete, the reduced expedition was to commit itself to the stream, to be carried whither its unknown and mysterious current might lead.

I found myself included among the latter. Not only could I handle an oar, but I could assist the commander in taking his daily observations of the sun, having advanced so far in my nautical education under our own skipper.

Gentleman George also was included. He was even an expert oarsman, to which I had no pretensions. Who can say but in that past of his which was unknown to us, boating, under more favourable circumstances, may have played its part?

Well, I heard my own name mentioned with something like pleasurable feelings. A change it was, certainly. A change from the return to Sydney with the prospect of more blubber and more deck-swabbing before me. A change, too, from our present surroundings, which day by day had so hopelessly fallen off. On land, we had

now left behind us every remnant of the pleasant or the picturesque—unless a solitary and stunted cypress-tree, here and there keeping appropriate guard over the scene of desolation, could apply to the latter term. To be sure, this mysterious stream might lead, as already it had afforded us such strong indications, into a total and absolute waste, there to desert us. Still, motion on its water was a variety in itself, and that alone is attraction to youth.

But time for reflection there was not. All was now bustle and renewed energy. The drays, relieved of their stores, had to be extricated from the sand, and despatched on their return journey. The construction of the raft was the work of some time, and then the flour-sacks, our simple cooking utensils, &c., had to be transferred to it, and made fast as circumstances would permit. Soon the whaleboat returned to its former buoyant shape, and sat lightly on the water, secured to the bank. I was told off to take the tiller, Mr. McLeay himself handling an oar for the present. Our commander took his seat in the stern, with the compass in one hand and a sheet of paper in the other. The raft was already attached to the whaleboat by a rope, or "painter," and when all was completed the order was given to "let go."

Go where? Who of us could tell? At present we were bound for that unknown and incomprehensible Interior which had already been the subject of such variable conjecture at Sydney, and which even the black men who visited Sydney always referred to with vague but awe-inspiring significance.

As for our waterway, now that we were entirely upon it, there were better opportunities for examining its nature and character. For, previously, we had avoided its many bends and turns by merely striking the river from point to point. It was these bends and turns which obliged our leader to have his compass and paper always in hand, so that every angle might be accurately observed and recorded.

We found the river to consist of a succession of level "reaches," terminated at each end by a rapid, or fall, of a peculiar and rather alarming character. These were the critical occasions on which every hand had to be ready, and every eye strained. During them we passed through semi-darkness. Thus every sense had to be on the alert to avert a shipwreck which must be disastrous. For, if we were not ourselves drowned, we must assuredly lose our stores, which would amount to pretty much the same thing as far as our lives were concerned.

Let me describe one of these gloomy gorges, and I describe them all. The river, flowing broadly and pleasantly along one of its fine reaches, is suddenly contracted into a quarter of its breadth. High portals of jagged and jutting rock rise on each side of this narrowed channel, and are continued on each side of the gorge till it comes to an end. If we struck against one of these projections, no boat could stand the shock. Yet this was not our greatest danger. Vast accumulations of fallen timber had been carried into these gorges, and thus whole trees lay with their sharp points just under the surface of the current, or sticking up a little above it. One of these, had it struck our boat, would have ripped it up from stem to stern. Perhaps our greatest enemy was the imperfect light. For these constant and everlasting gum-trees still lined the top of the gorge on either side, and at times actually met over them.

To escape such dangers without an occasional ducking was a sheer impossibility. In fact, the raft was often under water, and we had to fish for our stores until we found them again. But by careful handling the whaleboat came through intact.

Troubles these, and hardships too. And yet I have omitted the greatest and ever-increasing one.

As the country began again to look up a bit, these river blacks began to look up too—and they *were* a worry. Both leader and men had determined to be of imperturbable good humour and patience ; and sorely were they tried. Often have I seen our leader submit to be pawed all over by the most unprepossessing of the human race. Of course this good humour had to be nicely balanced by firmness, amounting at times to decisiveness. It was done, though on occasions it was touch and go ; and we reaped the fruits of our long-suffering, or I would not be writing these lines now. There was no respite, too ; and, after a hard day's toil through reach and gorge, these savages kept us awake half the night with their impertinent familiarity ; and always a couple of men had to be told off to keep watch while the rest of us took a wink of sleep around our camp fire. For, however we could trust our lives to a conciliated tribe, our property was never safe.

This trouble began with small and even ridiculous beginnings. It was laughable to see, at first, the face of a single black peering out from a bush on the river's bank with marks of the liveliest astonishment. No white man had ever been in those regions before—we wanted no further evidence for that. Then this face disappeared, to be replaced,

lower down the bank, by half-a-dozen other black faces, all instinctive with the like surprise and curiosity. Again the evidence was clear that No. 1 had gone and informed his people of this irruption of a new and unknown race into their territory proper. Territories proper they had, for one local tribe seldom followed us further than a day's journey, though we always found that a couple of smart runners were sent on to the next tribe to communicate the wonderful intelligence. Hence the necessary policy of conciliation, combined with firmness, on our part.

At first this our appearance on the scene provoked the liveliest and most grotesque exhibition of resentment, especially as, immersed in our own absorbing care for the safety of the boats, we could not at all times turn our attention right off to conciliatory movements. However, some little presents were always received in good part, and some further exhibition of our prowess, such as shooting a bird over their heads and the like, seldom failed to make friends; though I am bound to confess that their perfect stolidity under this latter exposition was worthy of the very highest order of stoicism. We often asked ourselves was it affected or real?

Each night we drew into the river's bank and,

having made safe our boats, cooked our evening meal. When we got rid of the blacks the frogs from some neighbouring marsh, or overflow of the river, kept up a dull, monotonous *thud* during the whole night. These ponds — “billebongs” the blacks call them—seemed absolutely full of these staring creatures, which slept all day and “glugged” all night.

There was a better order of blacks, too, as we advanced and the country continued to improve. I write especially of the men. Some of these old fellows—quite merry and laughing—were not at all bad to look at, with good heads, well-developed bodies, but small short legs. However, as they strutted about, bearing themselves with remarkably erect carriage, I presume their legs served for all the purposes they needed. We all laughed consumedly, both whites and blacks. You see, it was the one mutual language we were in possession of, even if we understood that. Endless were the devices and expedients resorted to in order to ascertain where this river was going to. We learned nothing, and I believe the blacks themselves knew nothing about it.

Though they appeared confined to localities, they made not the slightest effort to improve their quarters. Habitation of any kind there was none

Wherever a man and his family found themselves at night there they lay down in the scrub, or broke a few boughs to serve for the occasion only. And though the days were hot enough in all conscience, the nights and mornings were often cold and raw, and these creatures seemed to suffer terribly from any lowering of the temperature.

CHAPTER IV.

A DISCOVERY.

ON the seventh day of our sail down the Murrumbidgee a new and most unexpected surprise met us. From an unusually long and dark gorge we were shot out into a broad and noble river, coming at right angles to the stream we had been traversing.

This new river was here fully two hundred yards broad, and deep to the water's edge. The right bank, from whence we issued, rose precipitously out of the stream to a height of twenty-five or thirty feet, but the left bank was nearly level with the surface of the water. With such velocity had we been ejected out of the gorge, that our boat was carried right across the new river, and in a moment or so would have struck the low bank.

So unprepared were we for such a discovery that we made no effort to stay the progress of the

boat, until our attention was arrested by the alarming nature of the reception in store for us. For on this low bend were assembled the largest body of blacks we had yet seen. They were fully six hundred in number, and their hostile feelings and intentions were quite unmistakable. At first they appeared under the impression that we were about to fall into their hands—a misfortune we had barely time to anticipate. We stopped the boat and backed rapidly in the direction of mid-stream.

This timely manœuvre of ours was received with especial resentment by the natives. With spear in hand, the foremost of them prepared to wade into the water, which here shoaled, the bank, or rather promontory, being apparently in the nature of a landing-place.

Here was no room for conciliation. The opposite course of firmness and determination became imperative. Every man had his gun in hand, and our leader had covered a tall black, informing the party, in few but clear words, that with the first step of the native into the water he would fire.

What would have been the effect of that first shot, I must now leave to conjecture. Hitherto, we had extricated ourselves from its dire necessity, knowing that such an extreme course would alter the whole aspect and situation of the expedition in

these unknown and mysterious regions. The party would defend itself to the last—but who would return to tell the tale?

While the issue thus trembled in the balance, a new surprise was added to this day of unexpected discovery. I have already said that the bank on which the hostile natives were now posted was low, almost level with the water's edge; while the opposite bank was precipitous rock, rising high, and terminating in a tableland.

On this high bank now appeared four men, breathless, and also wildly gesticulating. Then one of them took a plunge from his lofty platform. He disappeared wholly in the stream, but in a moment his head was above water again, and he struck out for the opposite low bank. Soon he gained the land, and then renewing, or rather redoubling, his gesticulations, he paced up and down the beach, interposing between the hostile natives, and pointing frequently to our party in the boat. We now began to take the matter in. He was one of the friendly messengers sent on to procure us safe conduct. Had he and his native companions arrived a moment later, half a dozen rifles would then have rung out, and so many bullets would have been sent on their fatal errand. First blood would have been drawn, and the policy of concilia-

tion necessarily put aside during the remainder of our trip, whatever the termination might be.

As it was, our leader took care to explain to these natives what a levelled gun really meant, by shooting the first bird which offered. Friendly sentiments had now set in, and I doubt not this latter exhibition improved and cemented them, though received as usual with apparent indifference, not to say slight.

Then, for the first time, we had opportunity to examine our new discovery. In a country so peculiar and erratic about its rivers, we had certainly come across a stream worthy to take rank with the great watercourses of the Old World. We rowed out again into midstream. Our leader ordered the Union Jack to be unfurled, and, standing up in the boat, all gave three British cheers. That was the christening of the Murray. Captain Sturt gave it the name in honour of Sir George Murray, who was then Secretary of State for the Colonies.

So far, our expedition was not without its results. We had now cleared up the mystery of the Murrumbidgee. It was a mere tributary of this much larger river. In fact, its waters hardly gave any perceptible addition to the Murray. Our task, too, became lighter. We were done with the swift, gloomy gorges, with their endless mishaps. The

reaches of the new river grew longer, extending to eight and ten miles apiece. These long and broad tracts of level water were really beautiful; they were of an average breadth of from two hundred to three hundred yards, and from eighteen to thirty feet deep. All this contributed to make our labours easier and pleasanter. But our main object of inquiry grew proportionably in importance and interest. We ceased to speculate upon the ultimate career of the Murrumbidgee, now cleared up, only to put the same question as regarded the Murray. Where would it bring us? and how far would it assist in solving the grand mystery of the Interior?

That latter question had now necessarily associated itself in our minds with the problem of Australian exploration, and a few day's sailing on the Murray appeared to give us the answer. The new river was not heading toward the Interior; in fact, it was sheering off. We were now five hundred miles from Sydney as the crow flies; but we were in no higher latitude. Still, practically, this river and its career would more immediately interest the good people of Sydney, and for that reason, if for no other, we were bound to follow investigations on its waters.

A few more days' sailing down its banks brought us another surprise, calling for a whole reconsidera-

tion of the subject between our commanders. This was the junction of a very considerable river, almost as large as the Murray itself, and coming straight from the north. Here was a waterway right into the Interior. Should the expedition abandon the Murray and make a dash to solve the grand problem of all ?

Now, I will ask my readers to recall our previous ineffectual attempt to get into the Interior, when we came across the waters of the Darling, and found them quite salt, and thus had to make forced marches back to Sydney. Our commander had mapped down all this former route, and had the very charts with him in our whaleboat. After careful comparison of bearings and distances he now arrived at the conclusion that this junction was the termination of the Darling—an assumption which facts have since verified.

What complexion did this put upon the matter ? The Darling, at our first and former experience of it, was salt ; the country around it of the most unpromising nature ; our present small party wholly unprovided with facilities for land carriage. So our commander passed the word to continue our stages on the Murray, and soon we left the junction of these two waterways behind us. I shall have more to write of the Darling further

on, but, as the story books say, let me not anticipate.

As to this briny feature which we had found in the upper waters of the Darling on the former occasion, I should here explain. At its junction with the Murray, its waters were now quite sweet. Other Australian streams have the same peculiarity. The saltiness is local. Further, these local portions assume their brackish character only in periods of great drought. When there is a good continuous current, the brine is entirely overmastered, and is not perceptible.

Though we were not to learn the secrets of the Interior on this occasion, the Murray had its growing interests for us as we continued, day by day, to drop down its broad and placid tide. The river was now fully a quarter of a mile across from bank to bank. These banks, too, were altering in their character. For hundreds of miles we passed through a very singular formation. The sides of the river rose precipitously out of the stream in tall columnar form, representing at times curious and fantastic devices, the softer part of the rock having become worn away by high floods, leaving the harder part intact. As we continued our progress, gradually these banks declined in height, eventually descending to the water's edge, and disclosing an open and

most fertile-looking country. Sometimes, indeed, the prospect was most rich and lovely, as if Nature had taken to laying out pleasure grounds.

The term "park-like" has been so often applied to portions of Australian scenery, that I must beg my readers' pardon for its repetition here. But really, on occasion, I don't know that there is any other term so applicable. On such occasions, in travelling through the country, I have found it hard to dismiss the illusion that I was in the midst of a fine old ancestral demesne, and that presently the family mansion, in corresponding keeping, would heave in sight. Those noble trees, sparsely scattered here and there, seem as if once planted by the hand of man for effect. Those lovely wattle-groves surely owe their origin to the same desire! Strange that we should have begun and ended our long river trip of some two thousand miles with examples of the best and most promising regions.

Wider and wider grew the banks apart. Finally they melted away in the hazy distance. We were floating on the bosom of a broad but shallow lake. By our reckonings we guessed that the lake could not be far from the ocean itself. Gulls, veritable seagulls, hovered over our boat. The crisp sea-breeze blew in our faces—and hark! as the central

current bore us along, the distant thunder of the surf on the sea beach reached our ears.

Gradually, however, this current—the last expiring effort of the Murray—died out altogether, and we lay motionless on the lake. Yes, the Murray, with all its noble promise, is quite an Australian stream after all, and joins the ocean in an insignificant and even furtive manner.

On the body of fresh water which practically forms the termination of the Murray our commander conferred the name of Lake Alexandrina, in honour of the distinguished lady who now sits on the English throne. Then we put out our oars, and proceeded to the further extremity of the lake.

A few low sandhills interposed between Lake Alexandrina and the ocean. Through these the overflow of the lake found its exit in some obscure and shallow channels. Of course, we knew, from our charts and maps, that we were now only a stone's throw from Encounter Bay. Quarter of a century before Captain Flinders had sailed up to the head of this bay, not having the least suspicion that behind this head lay a great waterway opening up into the country. We had much yet to learn of the peculiar features of Australia, especially as regarded its rivers. But here at least was a beginning. We

now began to suspect why marine surveyors, one after the other, had sailed round the coast without discovering any mouths of rivers. Certainly, in the case of the Murray, the explanation was patent. It could be observed from the land only, and not from the sea.

But for speculations of this nature there was no time left to us now. Our present position was a very critical one. Provisions were running short—for the last few days we had been on half-rations. Our commander frankly laid the case before the whole party. Two courses were open to us, and no more. There was the return by long sea voyage to Sydney; or we could make the attempt to retrace our way up the Murray, up the Murrumbidgee, and so to Yass Plains, where, for the first time, we could expect assistance. The long sea voyage was pronounced impossible. Winter had now set in, the gales on this coast were exceptionally severe, and an open boat could not be expected to live through them. To be sure, a row *up* river was a very different matter from our former progress down stream, to say nothing of failing stores and diminished strength. But the men unanimously elected to make the attempt, and so the matter was settled. It was now evening—our hope, if hope there was, lay in speedy action, and with the



THE RETURN JOURNEY.

morning's light the boat's head was to be turned homewards.

Notwithstanding the inducements to a long night's rest, the men scampered off to the sea-beach while light remained. They wished ocular proof of the fact that they had crossed from sea to sea—from Port Jackson on the Pacific to Encounter Bay on the Southern Ocean. On the beach we had the good fortune to come upon a bed of cockles. With a plentiful supply we returned to the boat. We regaled ourselves with these, and then awaited the rising sun. It was the last unstinted meal we had for many a day.

The men had a full sense of the gravity of the task which now lay before them; nor was it our commander's wish to conceal anything. A return to settled districts was possible under one condition only. Each day's stage of that return should cover the same ground as, with flowing tide and more liberal fare, we had dropped down the stream. All recognised the necessity of this—and it was never deviated from. For, far into the night the oars kept ceaseless and measured stroke—but we never pulled into bank until we arrived where our former camp-fire marked the day's termination of a down stage.

The discipline and unselfishness of the men

surpassed expectation. Our stores consisted simply of flour, tea, and sugar—all in insufficient quantity, and doled out accordingly. The men actually refused to take their share of the sugar. They said they had been used to hardships all their lives, and that it was little enough for the two commanders. This was true in all conscience. But the tea soon gave out, too ; and then commanders and men had to live on flour and water, varied by occasional fishing and shooting.

Far be it from me to detract from the good conduct and generosity of these men ; but long experience in this service of exploration leads me to infer that some of the credit of this is attributable to the commander. An indifferent leader may secure discipline when he has force at his back. Deprived of this, as such service as I now allude to must deprive him, he has only his own inherent good qualities to assist him. This was the case here. Again, I could anticipate—but I will proceed regularly with my narrative.

A few words as to this fishing and shooting may enliven the dull monotony of each day's toil. Of shooting there was a precious small account. When we got tolerably early to the end of a day's journey, our commander tried hard to add to our evening meal. But the district through which we were now

passing was singularly destitute of game. It had not been so in the settled districts, or even in the unoccupied regions immediately outside them. There wild duck, bronze-winged pigeons, and other delicacies soon filled a bag; while crows, laughing-jackasses, and the like ignoble game—which *now* would have furnished a rare treat indeed—were passed contemptuously by. There, too, occasionally a noble red kangaroo made a load in itself to bring back. But here an empty bag was the more ordinary return.

As regards fishing, it was not so. The river abounded with a fine large fish now known so extensively throughout the Australian settlements as "Murray cod." Of course it is a fresh-water fish, and not at all like sea cod, except in size. It is a large fish. We caught them up to 40 lb. weight apiece, and I am told they have been found up to 100 lb. weight each. Fishing had one advantage, too. It hardly interfered with our progress up the river. We set night lines at our camping grounds, and in the morning we were often rewarded with a large fish.

At this rate we could not starve, you will say. Well, would you believe it, after a course of this fish diet, the men absolutely refused to have any more of it, and neglected to set the night lines.

Now, Murray cod takes the place, at all Australian aldermanic feasts, of our turbot or salmon. And I make no doubt that, with the proper condiments, a guest may fix it in between his turtle soup and "the joint." All I can say is that after a while, and without any sauce, our men took such a loathing to fish diet that they preferred to starve.

Occasionally we caught a small freshwater turtle, and to that there never was any objection. My readers must not confound this with the great Moreton Bay turtle, which also is an Australian aldermanic luxury. The Murray turtles are very small, but if we could only have got enough of them we would have fared better.

Thus, whether we made our old camping-ground early or late—whether we recruited our strength with turtle or flour and water, we were always in our seats again with the dawn ; though some of us, through those wearisome blacks, had had no sleep at all. Every man took his turn at the oar, including our commanders. Often and often have I seen the men tugging at their oars when deep in the arms of Morpheus.

Even in our waking moments we were not communicative. Under such circumstances men rarely are—unless when they go off their heads, which sometimes happens. But there was one subject

which we specially avoided, though I believe it was in all our minds. If our trials were so great in pulling up those placid reaches of the Murray, what would be our fate when we came to climb the dark, swift gorges of the Murrumbidgee?

It was, therefore, with mingled feelings we completed our last stage on the Murray, and prepared to enter that Pass through which the Murrumbidgee pours its tributary stream into the larger river. It was a satisfaction that so much of our return journey had been accomplished, but the real trial of endurance yet remained.

Our oars we found useless. The boat refused to face the current. Fortunately, the stream was here comparatively shallow, and by means of poles we were able to propel the boat and keep her head to the opposing waters. But even this was only under favourable circumstances. At times she swung round, and, spite of all our exertions, we lost ground instead of gaining it. At such times we had to take to the water ourselves and haul her up by means of a rope. Here the men had to wade up to their arms in the stream and breast the violence of the tide as best they could. This, perhaps, was the greatest trial of all; for, what between the heat of rowing and the chill of these sunless waters, the severest strain

was now upon us. But there was no murmur, and when the call arose action was instant and uncompaining.

Such hardships must tell, you may say. And so they did. Poor Gentleman George was the first to give way. Fortunately, this was near the end of our journey, and when we had left the gorges pretty nigh behind us. From sitting silent in his seat like the rest of us he began to shift from seat to seat. Probably he found none of them over and above comfortable. Then his tongue became loosed; he told us the most ridiculous stories. The men treated him like a child and took his tasks upon their own heavily weighted shoulders.

I need not say with what relief we saw our carefully noted camping-grounds certainly, if slowly, diminish their tale, until finally we left all behind.

Even here a disappointment, sharp but short, was in store for us.

Our commander's orders to the drays returning to Sydney had been to procure a fresh supply of provisions and await us where we first took to the river. They misunderstood their instructions, and were waiting at the last sheep-run instead.

The distance was two days' forced march, but a

couple of the freshest of the men readily volunteered the task. There they found the drays splendidly provisioned, and soon they were with us.

Some of our men made up for lost time by indulging in hearty meals, but our leader and a few others could hardly be induced to take food, and regained their appetites only by degrees.

We met a most gratifying and cordial reception on our return to Sydney. We had been six months absent, and forebodings about us had been gloomy.

CHAPTER V.

THE OVERLANDERS.

I HAVE proved myself a poor hand at an explanation if my readers are not prepared for the long pent-up curiosity of the good people of Sydney regarding our commander and his late doings. We had started in the autumn—of course I mean the Australian autumn—in order to have the assistance of what rain might fall, and here we were back in the spring, when already conjecture had supposed us to have crossed that bourn from whence no traveller returns. During that half year, what had we done with ourselves, or, rather—for that, I doubt not, was the main question—what had we done for *them* toward the practical enlargement of territory?

Our commander did not keep them long in suspense. He had everything cut and dried. He extenuated nothing—to nought did he communi-

cate too high a colouring. The way was long—much of the country passed through was unpromising and apparently unfertile—but, as he spoke to energetic and enterprising men, he could assure them that beyond these difficulties lay a fruitful and attractive district. There were details, which I omit ; but that was the sum and substance of Captain Sturt's account.

Of course details were gone into. The growing idea of the cattle owners of New South Wales was too large and too costly to risk a leap in the dark. The idea was this. Cattle had multiplied beyond the resources of the settled districts, and the country immediately outside them had been reported as unsuitable—a report which, my readers may call to mind, we had practically verified in our last excursion. But if available districts really existed outside them again, the way and the difficulties were not of so much concern.

That was the commencement of a class of Australian stock-dealers which soon came to be widely known as Overlanders. You see, those superabundant flocks and herds of the settled districts were comparatively low in value. The supply far exceeded the demand. Now, if a portion of their flocks and herds could be transferred to unoccupied and fertile districts, new

settlers would eagerly bid for them. In fact, something like the old keen competition of former days would arise, though on a more reasonable and safer basis.

So the Overlander was to be merely a jobber, I think I hear you say. Well, many of the Overlanders bought their flocks and herds in the Sydney districts and sold them to new settlers on the shores of our Lake Alexandrina, returning to Sydney to buy again and to sell again as before. Others brought their flocks and herds and settled down for good in the new territory, becoming permanent residents. But there is another consideration which perhaps you may overlook. Very often new enterprises in new countries assume large and unexpected proportions, and this was the case here. Capital was necessary, and intelligence, and energy to meet the incessant calls upon it. Some of the best English families had representatives among these Overlanders. Many of them had been Oxford men and Cambridge men. Nor in their rough life in the wilderness had they lost their culture, their polish and frankness as gentlemen, and even their acquaintance with the current topics of the day.

While as to the proportions which this new

enterprise assumed, I will just give you one specimen from a number which I have kept by me. Among the earlier results of Captain Sturt's trip down the Murray, here is a list of purchases which a gentleman made in Illawarra, one of the Sydney settled districts, for the purpose of following in his footsteps. His horned stock cost £8,550; his horses amounted in value to £3,720; and sheep, £1,575. Thus he invested a capital of £13,845 on the risk of a long and untried way, literally, as I said before, in the wilderness.

Of course, with flocks and herds of such dimensions, water carriage was entirely out of the question. The way was to be along the banks of the Murray, and hence arose the term "Overlanders."

Such large convoys needed many "hands." There were stockmen, and herds, and cooks, and storekeepers. In the early ventures the men of our late party were specially in demand. They knew the way, at least—and that was much. I had more than one offer, and through the intervention of my master, our late leader, I ceased my connection with the sea entirely. I entered on my new duties as stockman. Now, a stockman is always in the saddle; his business is to keep a large herd of cattle together and to direct them in the proper way they should go. An ambitious

undertaking, you may think, for a seafaring young man. But, then, I was the one member of the convoy who knew anything about the way, who was ever that way before ; and so I agreed to make myself useful as best I could.

This is how I come to introduce this little chapter on Overlanding, but which, as you will presently see, made a very important link in the development of Australian exploration.

I soon came to know my duties—chiefly I have to thank my horse for that. I do believe a trained stock-horse is the most intelligent animal that goes on four legs. My main business lay in pursuing and bringing back the wild cattle which continually break away from the herd. The stock-horse has his eye on them. Directly there is a break, off he goes too, like a shot. Some of these wild cattle lead a pretty chase. But the stock-horse hangs on to their haunches until he gets a chance to head them. Then the pursuit is over, and the sulky brutes return to their companions of the herd.

We did not strictly adhere to the banks of the Murray. The various turns and twists of that river would have much lengthened a way which was long enough. Of course, in our boat we were tied to the stream. But now, with such know-

ledge gained thereby, it was possible to cut off an arm here, to escape a considerable detour there. Nevertheless, the river was our main guide throughout.

Events have always developed themselves rapidly in these Australian settlements. Here was a case in point. What a contrast we now presented to the small boat's party which, a few months before, had passed up and down this way, with their lives in their hands. Now we were a really imposing party. If we astonished the natives before, how great their present surprise as our vast cavalcade came thundering along — here dashing through those primeval woods, there plunging into the river to cut off some tedious angle. All was turmoil and apparent confusion and incessant advance, for these wild herds must be pressed continuously on through the day or they will make effort to return to their camping-ground of the night before. To the din of hoofs and stock-whips and lowing of cattle was occasionally added the sharp crack of the rifle, for alas ! whatever the astonishment of the blacks, they still maintained an eye to their old business, and stole our cattle when they could.

Our day was an early one, too. While there is light the cattle will not feed ; their thoughts are

fixed on an escape homeward. Only with the night do they reconcile themselves to circumstances and quietly browse. With the first peep of day the fit is especially strong upon them. Hence our early start each morning.

The evenings alone afforded us repose ; we could trust the cattle to take *their* rest until day dawned. Sometimes it was in the depths of the great forest—sometimes at the river's banks beside one of those "billebongs"—anon in the midst of some vast plain which we had toiled over all the preceding day, and which we expected to toil over on the coming day.

I may here make a remark which I would like my readers to carry with them. It applies to many districts of Australia, and, I doubt not, to many districts of other new countries. I have passed through regions whose beauty and fertility at once struck the eye—I have passed through regions whose barrenness neither time nor further acquaintance could remove—but there are intermediate qualities of region which improve as they become better known. Furthermore, in traversing a district a party may chance on an unpromising route, while the country, on one side of them or the other, may be better. I make this explanation because, as I shall have to describe some singularly

weird and desolate scenes, I do not wish to encourage the impression that all is barren from our Antipodean Dan to Beersheba.

Now, something like this was the case in the very region I here write of, though nothing approaching what I have yet to tell. On the former occasion our advance out of the settled districts was unpromising, and I see no reason to greatly modify my description. But further acquaintance with this vast watershed of the Murray revealed immense tracts of fair and habitable land. These were mainly the result of subsequent discovery. On to the shores of Lake Alexandrina was now the cry, and I resume my narrative.

I had now made several of these overlanding trips down the Murray, each time more and more surprised at the wonderful development of the new settlements which had sprung up at its termination on Encounter Bay. This was not merely the result of its cattle pastures. In a short time the settlement came to find a speciality of its own. The truth is disappointment had been long felt at the poor yield of cereals in the Sydney districts. An Australian climate, it was said, ought to grow wheat in perfection, but somehow the lands of New South Wales said not. Thus, among the other

subjects of inquiry our leader had taken with him in his venture down the Murray, he was particularly asked to be on the look out for wheat lands. When he returned from that trip he gave it as his opinion that the shores of Lake Alexandrina would grow wheat. The experiment had been now made, and, in a few years, the best wheat in the world was grown there. Vineyards also thrived magically. In due time accounts of all this had reached Europe, and emigrants directly from England and Germany were pouring into the new settlement.

A town had grown up, which soon developed into a city, on which was conferred the name of Adelaide. Hitherto the authorities at Sydney were rulers over the Pacific from Port Jackson to New Zealand. But to the new settlement at Adelaide was now conceded the rights of an independent colony, under the title of South Australia. My old leader, too, had severed his connection with military matters, and had taken up his residence in the new settlement he had done so much to found, as commissioner of its Crown lands. From him I learned much of what was going on in the young colony. "Billy," he said to me one day, "I think we shall want your services again."

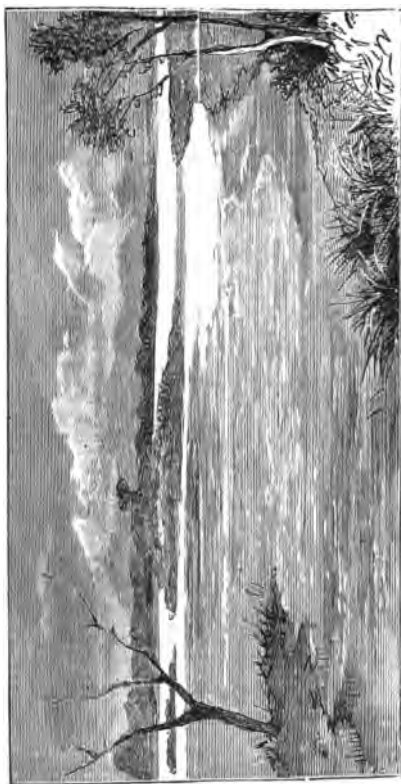
This was said to me in a half-laughing manner, and I made no reply at the time. But it set me thinking and inquiring; and what I heard I am now going to tell.

Well, as it had been with the settlers around Sydney, so now it was soon with the settlers round Adelaide—only more so. To be sure, there were no Blue Mountains, but there was something still more mysterious. Just as in Sydney, too, the theory of an inland sea had taken strong possession of the new settlers, from the following circumstances.

With flocks and herds pouring down the Murray from the old colony; with new settlers arriving from the Old World, the demand for land was, of course, considerable. Now, the new settlement having sprung up on the borders of the Southern Ocean, such an inquiry for land was naturally directed to the north. Not that the country to the north of Adelaide was at all promising. But then it was hoped that beyond this immediate district, and with a whole island-continent to face, country prospects would improve. Adelaide had now its staff of Government surveyors with a surveyor-general at their head, and they were incessantly making observations in the district I have referred to.

Now it had happened that this surveyor-general, Mr. Goyder by name, had advanced some days' journey north with a small exploring party, the country becoming even more unpromising still. Then lo ! some enchantment waved its wand, and the astonished party gazed on a transformed scene. Before them stretched a lovely calm sea, interspersed with green islands, and inviting a sail upon its surface if they only possessed the necessary boat. Without more ado the party returned to Adelaide, and having provided themselves with a boat, and having stirred up the good people of the city to the highest pitch of expectation, returned to their former point of observation. But, in the meantime, the wand had been reversed. There were no islands, no sea ; on the contrary, the party now gazed over a region of profound and arid desolation. It had been a curious and wonderfully imposing instance of mirage.

Having got so far, and possibly being in no hurry to return to Adelaide, Mr. Goyder had determined to go further north if he could. The country continued steadily to withhold all promise. But eventually he did come across something in the nature of a lake, though of a most mysterious character. This lake he ascertained to be shaped like a horseshoe, he and his party standing on the



GOYDER'S LAGOON.

inside of the curve. It was composed chiefly of mud with a thick white coating on top, looking like snow. All efforts to cross or outflank this singular feature proved unavailing, and Mr. Goyder brought his party back to Adelaide.

Such was the strange story my inquiries now elicited. I leave my readers to conjecture why my leader, Captain Sturt, had addressed me with a laugh on his face. I was glad I had made no reply, as became our relative positions. Nevertheless, I began to think that he had some serious meaning in what he had said.

For I heard even more. Something in the nature of discontent was actually spreading in the new settlement. This was chiefly apparent among the English and Germans, who had come out direct from the Old World. To be sure, the land around Adelaide had proved everything that had been represented to them. And they had gone to work with a will. I myself was a witness of the pleasant homesteads, the rich wheat fields, the lovely vineyards which lay all around. But what of that, if a fine young colony was to be hemmed in by the regions of gloom and desolation which inquiry was bringing to light? I do not exaggerate when I say that about this time every settler in South Australia was beside himself on the subject of

extension of available territory. Whenever I came to Adelaide with a new Overland drove, nothing was to be heard of but public meetings, lectures, reports—and all about new lands which, somehow or other, would not “turn up.”

Eventually, these discussions resolved themselves into two great projects. Taking into consideration the obstacles which had opposed progress to the north, our late leader was in favour of a more western route. Western Australia was a region practically unlimited in extent. At its extreme western point the English Government had long maintained a small settlement, Albany, on King George's Sound, for the relief of ships' inward and outward bound. All else was unknown. Now, if a communication by land could be established between Adelaide and Albany, then would there be a basis of operation for extending settlement into these vast and unknown tracts. So, in effect, said Captain Sturt.

Then rose a gentleman with whom my present avocations brought me much into connection, and who, as fortune would have it, was to be my next commander. This was Mr. Eyre.

I have already hinted that these Murray blacks continued to be troublesome. They stole the cattle of the Overlanders, and got shot in return. Every

one said that this ought not to be. We had occupied the territories of these natives, and we were bound to treat them as leniently as we could. Such was the origin of a Black Protectorate. Mr. Eyre had himself been an Overlander, and he was now the first Black Protector, occupying a station on the Murray, called Moorundi, where he dispensed food and clothing to the natives, and successfully mediated between them and the Overlanders.

Unexpectedly Mr. Eyre now spoke. Against the opinion of Captain Sturt, he was in favour of a direct northern route—"straight for the Interior and for the Centre. The investigation of the interior of our adopted land has been too long delayed, and is not creditable to us as enterprising settlers."

Mr. Eyre struck the chord which really responded. Spite of my late leader's experience, and the obligations which these new settlers owed him, he found himself in a minority on the present occasion. With practical unanimity it was now resolved that Mr. Eyre should leave his present occupation, and take command of this great north exploring expedition.

My late commander made graceful concession to the popular movement, saying it should have his assistance and good wishes. The duties of his

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new office would detain him in Adelaide ; but in Mr. Eyre the colonists would find a leader of experience and ability.

The new expedition had no lack of volunteers. I felt my own exploring instincts strongly on the return, and, owing to my close connection with Captain Sturt and Mr. Eyre, had no difficulty in finding myself enrolled as member of the party.

This was the largest and most imposing undertaking I had yet seen, far transcending our departure from Sydney to found the very settlement whose enlargement we were now in quest of. Never shall I forget the lively and inspiring scene as we emerged from Adelaide on the morning of our departure. The Governor of the new colony had given a public entertainment, when he had presented Mr. Eyre with a Union Jack, which he was to plant in the centre of the island-continent. The whole city saw us outside its bounds ; all the chief settlers were there, and the ladies waved their handkerchiefs until we vanished into the dim distance. Thus we found ourselves alone in the wilderness.

CHAPTER VI.

HEROIC MEASURES.

THIS is going to be a short chapter. The great north exploring expedition never came to anything. But, in order to understand what its failures immediately led to, I must tell my readers what we did, what we tried to do, and what position we found ourselves in when circumstances proved too much for us.

I confess I was curious to see for myself this mysterious lake—Lake Torrens had been the name Mr. Goyder had conferred upon it—which had so baffled the previous party. After some ten days' march, due north—there it was, sure enough. It was a very real thing, and certainly no mirage at all; and yet we could see the opposite side of the lake about twenty miles distant. Was it not possible to gain this opposite side? The attempt brought us into closer and more intimate

acquaintance with the nature of the intervening distance. The surface had been accurately described to us as quite white, like freshly fallen snow. We now found this to be a thick coating of salt. When we removed it a deep and treacherous mud lay underneath, deepening toward the opposite shore. Nor did our greatest peril consist of this. Ever and anon deep pits were concealed under the white covering, the incrustation itself resting, like rotten ice, on a clear but strong solution of brine. Everywhere the horses sunk lower and lower as advance was made into the lake. As for the brine pits, they were such dangerous traps that we had to feel our way cautiously, preferring even the deepening mud to the bottomless pits. To further diminish our hopes the opposite shore appeared to rise straight out of the lake, conveying to us the impression that the deepest portion would be found there.

Mr. Eyre, accompanied by a couple of us and the best of the horses, made four different attempts, at so many several points, to cross the lake. But after persevering to the point of rashness, we had hard work to extricate ourselves from the tenacious mud, and regain firm footing again.

The whole party was now shifted in a western direction along the shore of the lake, in the hope

of meeting some termination of its course, and thus outflanking it. But this manœuvre was accompanied by its own drawback. In consequence of the horseshoe-shape of the lake, we now found ourselves executing a retrograde movement ; and, in fact, in a short time we were proceeding due south instead of the northward route which was the aim and object of the expedition.

Tactics were reversed, and the whole party retraced its steps to our first meeting with the lake, ultimately proceeding in an eastern direction, and apparently with somewhat more of promise. For certain, we had succeeded in outflanking Lake Torrens, and eventually we left it on the left hand, our own course being now due north.

A word of explanation remains as to this impediment in our path, which we were at length leaving behind us. We had no suspicion of the actual facts of the case at the time—it took years and years to obtain a more accurate knowledge of the region I am treating of ; and, even then, it was the result of the merest chance. In very truth Lake Torrens is little more than a geographical expression. It is not a lake, but a district interspersed with these collections of mud, brine, and occasional deep water. Years after, a traveller escaping from the interior, passed dryshod through

this district and found himself at the head of Spencer Gulf, that great arm of the Southern Ocean on which the city of Adelaide stands. He had passed these fatal pitfalls on his right hand and on his left, but found his own course solid throughout. Here, then, is confirmation of the remark which I have previously offered as to the uncertainty of first impressions; as, also, that more important discoveries are made from the interior than from the coast. Had we the least suspicion of the real constitution of this Lake Torrens district, or had we the luck of this later traveller of happening on a way through these quagmires, we might have approached the real task of the great northern expedition with more fresh and unexhausted energies, and so scored a success. But it was not to be.

However, we had now extricated ourselves from the sloughs and pitfalls of Lake Torrens, and there was no longer that impediment to our due course north. Other impediments there certainly were. The country, if it afforded a firm footing to man and beast, was otherwise of a most forbidding character. It had now settled down into a dead level, covered with close scrub, and entirely destitute of water. Progress through this was of a slow and exhaustive character. Finally, the bulk

of the expedition could be conveyed no further north. Hitherto our unbroken horizon had equally deprived us of conjecture or promise of the country beyond. But now a solitary hill had begun to show itself in the distance. Leaving the main party in its far from comfortable quarters, Mr. Eyre and a couple of us made an advance for this eminence. It might afford water, and so enable the bulk of the expedition to be brought on ; at all events, it would command a prospect of the country further north. At length we found ourselves toiling up its incline. Painfully we surmounted its highest elevation, and blank was the promise it afforded us. Cheerless and hopeless indeed was the prospect now before us. The same desolate level lay beyond as that we had with such difficulty already advanced through. To our right, far away over the hot and palpitating arid waste, we caught glimpses of the white shores of our old tormentor, Lake Torrens ; we had advanced, not beyond, but merely beside, this lake district. Previously, when we had last abandoned that mysterious feature of the country, it had been on our left hand. If it now showed up on the other side, we had not yet extricated ourselves from its meshes, and were bound to meet it in front again. I think this consideration determined our leader. Merely delaying

to take some necessary rest, and having conferred on our present eminence the name it bears to this day, Mount Hopeless, he ordered a retreat to the main expedition.

I cannot say whether our leader had yet formed thought of the desperate resolve he was to take. If he had, he was equally determined that every possible alternative should be tried, and exhausted, previously. The whole party now proceeded southward until the head of Spencer Gulf was reached. Here, instead of returning to Adelaide along the eastern side of the gulf, we entered upon its other or western side, known as the Port Lincoln district. The supply of water and herbage was now plentiful, and men and cattle were allowed some days to recruit. After that, our leader, taking a couple of his men in turns, made a series of harassing and exhaustive excursions northward, in the hope of finding some practical inlet to the interior, and thus carrying out the original intentions of the expedition. In every case, this small party of advance was driven back on the main expedition, the men having reached the utmost limits of endurance, and some of the best of the horses perishing on the way.

Then, at length, Mr. Eyre stated his final resolve to us. The bulk of the expedition was to return

to Adelaide. He himself was now to adopt Captain Sturt's original proposition, and see if a way could be effected to the settled districts or Western Australia.

CHAPTER VII.

AN INHOSPITABLE COAST.

TO understand the feelings of the party, and, for the matter of that, of the whole city of Adelaide when this final resolve of our leader became known there, I must tell my readers how far information had already reached as to this coast-line which was now to be the scene of Mr. Eyre's purported exploit.

On the land side, absolutely nothing was known —no white foot had ever essayed to tread the fifteen hundred miles which intervened between Adelaide and the small settlement on King George's Sound. From the sea, it was otherwise. Accurate marine surveys had been made by such an authority as Captain Flinders ; but no landing had been ever effected ; the physical features of the coast had rendered it impossible.

The warm waters of the Pacific here meet with

the cooler temperature of the Southern Ocean, and a violent current, taking its rise at King George's Sound, sweeps along the whole coast. This current has eaten into the coast, so that the whole line from King George's Sound to Spencer Gulf represents an arch, obtaining its highest point at the head of the Great Australian Bight, midway to Adelaide. Captain Flinders, to whom the Australian colonies are chiefly indebted for these marine surveys, had left on record his impressions of this coast. The current referred to had eaten away the rocky tableland, until the cliffs now rose perpendicularly to a height of six hundred feet above the sea. He had approached these cliffs as nearly as safety would allow, the topmost masts of his vessel measuring insignificantly with their altitude. From time to time, huge masses of rock, undermined by the action of the current, tumbled into the seething waters. Thunders resounded through the vast system of caverns which the work of destruction had already created, and his vessel danced like a cockleshell on the billows which spread from the coast. No stream had been observed to find its way from the interior to this coast.

So much was known, and had been matter for endless comment and conjecture previous to

the departure of our northern expedition from Adelaide.

This unexpected resolve of Mr. Eyre was now the subject of much surprise and protest at Adelaide, with which there was some communication before starting. My former leader, Captain Sturt, especially urged an abandonment of the idea, at least for the present. Probably, and perhaps correctly, he judged that his own proposition to attempt an overland communication with Western Australia may have influenced Mr. Eyre toward his present intentions. Certainly, he now wrote to him to the effect that he, Mr. Eyre, had done everything which human endurance demanded, and that he should now return to Adelaide, and concert further measures. His own proposition had never involved the idea of committing men to an untried desert, and he was still of opinion that a conjunction with Western Australia was feasible only by the united co-operation of the two settlements.

Against all such remonstrance and advice, Mr. Eyre was now obdurate. One modification only of his intentions was the ultimate result. His idea had been to travel overland to King George's Sound, accompanied by two native youths from his own Black Protectorate on the Murray and a

native boy, named Wylie, who had come to Adelaide in a sailing vessel from King George's Sound. These three aborigines had formed part of our late northern expedition. His own overseer at Moorundi, a white man, had also accompanied us, and he now refused to abandon his master on the present occasion. I added my entreaties, and, at length, they were successful. The rest of the expedition was peremptorily despatched to Adelaide. That Mr. Eyre's original intention was to risk no European life save his own, I have sufficiently explained. But that he was conscious of the magnitude of the task which he was undertaking, I am also aware. For, with the expedition now returning to Adelaide, he wrote—"The bridge is broken down behind us, and we must succeed in reaching King George's Sound or perish. No middle course remains."

Besides ourselves and the three native boys, our diminished convoy now consisted of a few pack-horses and a small flock of sheep. The horses carried our supply of flour. The sheep we drove before us; they were to be our food, unless the country yielded a change. These sheep obtained sustenance when it fared ill with the horses; but they are poor travellers. They enabled us to

economise our flour for future emergencies ; that was all. Man endures most. In my experience, the sheep succumbed first, the horses next, and the men last.

The herbage of Port Lincoln quickly deserted us, being replaced by some scanty tufts, deriving existence from the loose sand which formed our line of way. On these the horses and sheep endeavoured to recruit, when we halted for the night. Toward inland, the country was hidden from our view by a high and dense wall of scrub. Water was our chief subject of inquiry, and, for the first two days, we met no traces of it whatever. This told visibly on the horses and sheep, such herbage as was procurable being harsh and dry. We carried a few water-bags with us from Port Lincoln at starting. But this we used sparingly. Who could say when their contents would be renewed ?

In fact, as we advanced, the prospects were against such supposition. We were now on that high tableland which Captain Flinders had observed from his ship. During the day a hot, parching wind blew from the interior, though the nights were chilly. This wind blew sometimes with violence, and was clearly a prevailing wind ; for, in process of time, it had accumulated

ridges of sand along the edges of the cliffs, while, underneath the ridges, lay the hard solid rock forming the cliffs and tableland.

This loose sand much impeded our progress, and we made repeated attempts to alter our line of march a little more inland. But the close wall of scrub resisted all attack upon it, and indeed, as far as we could observe, the whole country inland appeared covered with it, and thus impassible. Nevertheless, these sand ridges had their advantages. They gave life to what herbage there was, without which the horses and sheep must have soon succumbed. Presently, we found one more consideration in their favour, such as it was.

I have said that these ridges plainly owed their origin to the wind from the interior which prevailed during the day, carrying with it, seaward, clouds of sand. At night, the sea breeze sprang up, the result of the conflict being a deposit of sand on the extreme edge of the tableland, which had arranged itself into these ridges. Toward the end of our third dry and toilsome day's march, a new arrangement of the sand arrested our attention. Instead of being formed in parallel ridges, it was collected into a number of small mounds, or hillocks. The change could have been the subject only of some curiosity to us had other and

more pressing considerations left us sufficiently inclined thereto, but that something further was noticeable. The herbage at the foot of these dunes was less sparse and rather more healthy looking. Could this indicate the presence of some moisture? It was our leader who made the observation, and no time was lost in practically testing the suggestion. On scooping down to the foundation, a little moisture trickled out between sand and rock. What there was of it was quite sweet, and the process of filtration, though slow, was continuous.

Of the origin of this moisture, where all else had been dry down to the bed-rock, little doubt could now remain. The cause of the sandhills themselves was probably a difference in the day or night currents of wind, forming eddies. But, at seasons, there must have been prevalent rainfalls too, though we got the direct benefit of none of them during our whole journey; and the water thus falling on the surface, and getting caught among the sand-hills, sank to the bed-rock, and there remained.

It was far into the night before we had succeeded in watering the cattle from our impromptu well. Indeed, they much impeded our efforts toward their relief. It was not possible to keep

them from the well, and their hoofs often undid our work by half-filling the pit with sand again.

With early morning we renewed our operations at the well by filling the water-bags. This group of sandhills rose so high that we had observed it during our previous day's journey, though without conjecture as to its nature, or the temporary relief in store for us. With daylight we had eagerly scanned the horizon to see if the change was continuous or even repeated within visible ken. But, alas! the sandridges took up their parallel courses within a stone's throw of us, and so stretched away as far as sight could follow. Hence our necessity for filling the water-bags.

We hardly expected a recurrence of the sandhills on that day's journey, and, when we reached the end of the day's march, there was still light to see no such trace ahead. But when we had travelled to the end of the second day's journey, and the third, and still saw no indication, the dangers of our position began to assume even more serious aspects. We had thrown ourselves upon an unknown wilderness, and it had proved more inhospitable than conjecture could have conceived. Was even return still possible? We were now three days without water; in the

exhausted state of man and beast, we could hardly expect to retrace the distance to the former group of sandhills in three days more. Before that time, probably, we should be all dead.

But we could proceed onward only under the condition that another group of sandhills would occur, and that soon. In this dilemma, our leader gave us a fresh instance of his endurance and solicitude. Provided with a water-bag, he started on a forced march ahead of the party, which was to travel on as best it could in his wake, his object being to ascertain the question, now vital, of a recurrence of a group of sandhills.

After Mr. Eyre had thus left us, our progress though slow, was equally disastrous. By this time our sheep had all disappeared, either in the form of food, or unable to keep up with the party. The horses carried the flour, tea, sugar, guns, and ammunition. They, too, began to exhibit symptoms of distress and failure. Reluctantly we relieved them of their loads, taking a few days' rations on our shoulders. This enabled them to keep up with us for some time longer. But, eventually, the end came. A horse dropped, and made no effort toward recovery. Soon another followed the example, and another. Lastly, we found ourselves alone—whites and blacks—struggling

on with the empty water-bags, in the direction in which our leader had gone.

At length Mr. Eyre made his reappearance. Yes, there was another group of sandhills ahead. It was still two days' journey distant ; he himself had travelled night and day, and perhaps we could make an effort to do the same. Under such prospect of relief, every energy was strained, and we reached the sandhills in safety.

Then commenced our real labours. The way we had passed over from the former group of sandhills, or, at least, the latter portion of it, still lay strewn with our provisions and the horses. It was difficult to know which of these might be the more essential to our ultimate escape from the wilds. On the flour-sacks we depended solely for food ; but, then, these could not be carried without the horses.

Our programme was soon arranged. The filling of the water-bags was our only source of delay, though this necessarily afforded us some needful rest. Then, each provided with a full water-bag, we retraced our course to the horses. Some we found past help ; others we resuscitated with the water, and brought slowly on to the sandhills. Then ensued an entire rest of some days, for man and beast. There were arrears of work still in store

for us. But the flour-sacks could wait ; while the horses could not. As soon as the horses appeared sufficiently recovered, we retraced our steps for the second time, and brought provisions and baggage to the sandhills with their help. When all was safe, we made preparations for a fresh start, vainly conjecturing when we should meet a fresh group of sandhills.

I have been thus minute in my description of our varied labours from one group of sandhills to another group, in order that I may not inflict a repetition of them upon my readers. For our journey now consisted of a succession of them, and the routine was the same in all alike. In this manner we had, slowly and painfully, reached the head of the Great Bight, which brought us about half-way between Adelaide and King George's Sound, hoping that it would prove a turning point in the singularly uninviting character of the regions we were traversing ; but we found none. We still occupied this elevated plateau, gazing down on a seething ocean six hundred feet below us. Inland stretched away the dense, dreary scrub. Always our line of march consisted of this interminable sand, arranged in parallel ridges, unless when interrupted by the groups of sandhills, often two hundred and fifty and even three

hundred miles apart. The marine surveyors were correct here, at any rate, no stream finds its way to the shore along this considerable line of march. So far we had footed every mile of it, and put that beyond doubt. We had hopes of seeing some such change at the head of the Great Bight. But we had now passed it, without prospect or promise of fulfilment.

The trials which nature had so far interposed were indeed great. But we had yet to learn how the crime of man could aggravate them.

We had thus passed the head of the Great Bight with nothing to cheer us—with uncertainty as to our ultimate fate hanging over us in perhaps darker colours. The way was still long; the bridge was indeed broken down between us and our return, and we must persevere on to King George's Sound, or perish in the wilderness, as our leader, with less experience than he now possessed, had so expressed it.

We were in the midst of one of those tedious journeys from sandhills to sandhills. We had left the last group of sandhills three days behind us. During all such intermediate stages, the horses were an unceasing source of watchfulness and anxiety to us. Tormented by thirst, their efforts were to get back to the last watering-place. To

counteract this, the duty of watching them by night became indispensable, a couple of us in strict rotation taking their turns. On this special night the task had fallen to the share of our leader and myself during the earlier portion of it ; after that, we were to be relieved by the overseer and one of the native young men. The horses proved particularly restless, and had drawn us to a considerable distance from our temporary encampment. However, the moon had risen, and, though obscured, gave us sufficient light to observe their movements.

Suddenly the silence of these vast solitudes was interrupted by the report of a gun. I need hardly attempt to describe the effect of such a sound in them. We had been passing through regions which were clearly uninhabited, and we ourselves had found no use for our guns, the absence of the lower animals being as conclusive as that of man. Instinctively we turned our steps in the direction of the tent, where we had left the remainder of our small party.

About half-way we met Wylie, the King George's Sound boy, running towards us. When sufficiently near, he exclaimed, "Oh, massa ! oh, massa ! come here !" He could afford no further explanation — indeed, we hurried on to see for ourselves.

Within the tent, the overseer lay in the agonies of death ; he died almost simultaneously with our entrance. The sacks of flour had been broken open, and much of their contents taken, the tea and sugar being entirely abstracted. The two Murray blacks had disappeared.

The matter declared itself. The two Murray blacks had seized the opportunity of the leader's absence to possess themselves of the stores. The murder of the overseer had been premeditated—or he had defended his trust, and thus lost his life in the execution of an imperative duty. The crime was equally shocking, under every aspect. It was the intention of these ingrates to possess themselves of the stores, and leave us to starve in the wilderness. I call them ingrates, for their treatment under our leader was invariably kind and considerate. Of course, it is the strict and stern duty of a leader, under this, as under all similar circumstances, to apportion the stores with an economy conducive to the safety of the party. This had been done wisely and impartially.

There was just time for us to see that very little had been now left for us to subsist on. The Murray blacks would have effected a complete clearance, but they knew the report of the gun would bring us back to the tent. That, and the

loyalty of Wylie, had spared us a few days' provisions.

But time permitted no further delay or conjecture. We had left the horses at a distance from the encampment, and if they succeeded in getting too far ahead of us on the return path, good-bye to our chances of escape from our perilous situation.

Fortunately we came up with them, and headed them in the direction of the scene of this disaster. Then we kept watch over them during the hours of this long and terrible night. The sea-breeze had not yet set in—in fact the land-breeze was still blowing, and with quite exceptional violence. This being warm, and when we had come on watch expecting our relief at midnight, we were scantily clothed. But about midnight this sea-breeze set in, and chilled us terribly. It is hard to say whether distress of mind or body most predominated. Our inspection of the tent had been so hasty that we carried away no distinct recollection of the extent to which it had been rifled. The poor overseer was dead—that we had ascertained beyond possibility of doubt; all else was tormenting conjecture. Then as to our prospects—they had been hovering on the brink of despair; must not this event remove them beyond the pale of hope or expectation?

At length we dragged through the night ; never was dawn awaited with more longing and more apprehension. An examination by the light of day removed none of the gloominess of our previous conjectures. A few pounds of flour was all that now remained to us. Motives against delay had now become more pressing than ever. We were three days' journey from the last watering-place. Unless we hurried on to another group of sandhills, and they were not too distant, both men and beasts must succumb.

Scanty was the last tribute we could pay to our late companion, even if the consideration of time was not so inexorable. Our camping-ground was almost bare, even of sand—in places the hard bed-rock showed itself. We arranged such covering as was possible under the circumstances ; and thus, having collected the horses, and apportioned their diminished luggage, we were ready for a start.

Once, and once only, the two Murray blacks showed themselves. Our leader endeavoured to effect some conversation with them, but they declined. They made overtures to Wylie, the native boy ; but this meeting with no response, they retired. Our leader gave it as his opinion that eventually they perished in the wilderness ; and, considering not merely the uninhabited, but

the uninhabitable, character of the region, the probability is that it must have been so.

Whether owing to our diminished impedimenta or the desperate nature of the attempt calling forth every energy, we arrived at the next group of sandhills in safety.

Then we had the first halt and real rest after the late event I have recorded. We had now time for more full consideration of our position, and how we could meet it. Our last ounce of flour was gone. There was nothing eatable except the horses, and the alternative was not one to be merely contemplated, but to be put in practical force if we would live.

That evening we killed a horse, and, having partaken of a meal, prepared what we could carry away for future use. On this occasion Wylie developed a capacity which we had not previously suspected. Having performed more than his fair share at our evening meal, he informed our leader, "Presently, massa, you see me eat much more."

He was quite as good as his word. Frequently during the night we heard him getting up and continuing his repast. He complained of a horrible pain in his throat; he rolled on the ground in agonies of indigestion; but again and again he returned to his banquet of horse-flesh. In the

morning, when we made preparations for a start, taking with us as much as we could carry, he contemplated the remaining portions with tears in his eyes.

Through this last expedient of subsisting on our horses, we were so far enabled to press forward. Slowly, too, but still perceptibly, changes in the natural features of the country began to disclose themselves. From our long and elevated plateau of rock and sand we now found ourselves gradually descending toward the level of the sea. At the end of each day's journey we marked a proportional depression. Finally, and for the first time, we obtained actual access to a sea-beach itself. This was not so much a subsidence of the cliffs ; they retired inland, leaving a sea-shore instead.

Here, at last, we escaped from our long and continual exposure on our former elevated position. Occasionally, too, we caught a stinging ray, which varied, and even supplemented, our now failing resources. But, in truth, our own store of physical energy was on the wane, and we were conscious that endurance had reached its extreme limits. The change to the sea was change only. It added neither to our strength nor hopes.

When in this sad and extreme plight, a vision was presented to our gaze which we might well

attribute to the disordered condition of our minds and bodies. There, on the waters before us, and bathed in bright sunshine, lay a ship, motionless, and with her sails furled. Hitherto had we seen nothing on sea, nor yet on land ; all had been lifeless, desolate, inhospitable. Good reason had we to doubt our senses, if any senses still remained to us. But the more we gazed the more real the unexpected sight appeared to us.

Wylie, who probably trusted more implicitly to his evidence of things seen, now surpassed all his former feats of extravagant delight. He skipped, he leaped, he danced. He assured us we would now get plenty to eat. He still preserved a lively recollection of his trip from King George's Sound to Adelaide by sea, when the sailors had humoured his ruling propensities to the full.

But, though we took the matter with more outward calm, our mental commotion was no whit less extravagant. When we got over our ideas of illusion, other considerations gave us no less torment. What if the ship would sail away, and leave us in our present extremity ? To me, a sailor, the supposition was hardly a creditable one. There lay the vessel, motionless, on a calm sea ; not a single sail was set ; my practised eye told me, or ought to have told me, that the crew

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were all busy at some nautical repairs, instead of getting under weigh. But I must suppose that my reasoning faculties were not quite free from disorder of some kind.

However, we did not permit our imaginations to run away with our last chance of safety, and, during this time, we were making preparations for signalling the vessel. Our signals were soon perceived, and a boat was sent off, which brought us on board. The vessel proved to be a French whaling-ship, under the command of Captain Rossiter. She was indeed under temporary repairs, which would detain her some weeks off the coast.

We were treated with great kindness and hospitality. This, together with our new ease of mind, as well as of body, soon set us up again. When we were quite ourselves we were landed on the coast within easy reach of the small settlement at King George's Sound. We were now twelve months absent from Adelaide. Homeward-bound ships had told the few settlers here of the great North Expedition, and, later, of its present divariation along the south coast. They had waited, and waited, and then had given us up for lost. We were certainly not as imposing as when we had taken our departure from Adelaide. But then our achievement, if practically barren of results, had

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nothing to compare with it in the previous records of travel. Nay, it may be sometimes useful to prove a negative, and we had now demonstrated that 1,500 miles of a coast-line possesses no water-communication with the vast regions behind it.

CHAPTER VIII.

BEGINNING AT THE WRONG END.

WE had to wait until a vessel touched at King George's Sound before we could return to Adelaide. In my walks about the small settlement, and my talks with its few residents, I learned what was new to me. It lies somewhat without my own story, except that I heard it from actual partakers in the matter. But the tale is so strange that it may prove a relief from the dull monotony of the scenes I have just placed before my readers.

What I now learned was to the effect that this very small settlement, though with plenty of fine land about it, was the remains of one which had been commenced under great, not to say grand, ideas, and which had now dwindled down to a mere coastguard station, maintained to afford sailing vessels needful supplies of water and fresh provisions.

A decaying, or rather decayed, Australian settlement was something to attract my notice, especially as, within my own experience, I had seen, nay, had taken part in, so much to the contrary. Besides, the land was really of the best and finest quality, and the extent of territory to be allocated to the intended colony, under the title of Western Australia, was practically inexhaustible, measuring a third of the continent. And all this had taken place since my esteemed master, Captain Sturt, had made his trip down the Murray, which I have described to you, and which had added so important a new settlement to the continent. No wonder Captain Sturt had suggested inquiry in the direction of those western lands, but which, if at all successful, could be carried out, as he had himself said, only by united co-operation at both ends of the overland way. No wonder, now, my ears were open to the story I was to hear.

My informant had command of the flag-staff in this little town of Albany. He had been emigrant from the mother country, and colonist of the new settlement which was to rival Sydney itself; had then, like myself, taken a hand at exploring, of which I elicited something which I will tell further on; and, finally, he was now over this flag-staff, in sight of which he had a cottage and a piece of

ground, or garden, which grew everything from everywhere. I am writing of times before the world had its telegraphs and telephones. Then every coast-town had its flag-staff, which, by means of its series of nautical flags, indicated to its inhabitants the size, country, and final destination of each ship which came in view.

Thus, on more than one point, there was a community of interest between myself and Mr. Whitby, as was his name. His occupation at the flag-staff was in itself half nautical, while, as an actual member of an exploring party, I might consider myself, except for difference of ages, quite on an equality with him. I can very nearly give you his own words, for I listened attentively, and even reduced them to writing afterwards, knowing my former leader, Captain Sturt, would question me closely on the subject when I got back to Adelaide.

"Ah, yes," he commenced, "your eastern settlements have gone ahead, and no mistake. Now, why?"

I confessed I had not sufficiently arranged my thoughts for an explanation. Besides, I wanted to hear his view of the matter.

"Well, I'll tell you. I suspect your settlers were left to themselves. If they wanted more land—which appears to be the only thing they do want

—they were let go and find it. When they got it, they valued it, and used it accordingly. Whatever was to be done, they were left to do it for themselves. There was no coddling.”

“But the land was ready made, here—and limitless.”

“Just so. Everything was to be ready made. The colonists were to be sent out to a ready-made colony—where there was nothing ready at all! Land won’t work itself—that is what I meant when I said that settlers should come prepared to do their own work with their own hands, and do it. Nature will not do everything—nor yet hired service.

“Let me tell you how it was. The home Government—the Crown, as we say—gave a number of English gentlemen vast estates in this here Western Australia. The Governor of the new colony got 100,000 acres; Mr. Peel got 500,000; another 300,000, and so on. Of course, estates like that had to be worked—they knew so much; and each of these gentlemen brought out a whole retinue of hired servants. They brought out cattle, and seeds, and implements too; you see, they had some sort of an impression that nature would not do everything for them. I dismiss the furniture, and the pianos, and the other articles of luxury, which I

have seen with my own eyes knocking about the sea-shore, and never unpacked. It was as if each of those gentlemen thought he could transfer himself and his belongings to one of these estates *as a going concern* ! Instead of that he found his estate a great deal too big for him. He was only too glad to give his hired labourers portions of it in lieu of the wages he had contracted to pay them. Every labourer found he could have an estate of his own, and in a very short time it came to this—that not one of these gentlemen had a man to do even domestic service for him. These gentlemen, some of whom came out with as many as three hundred servants apiece, had to make their own beds, cook their own meals, and see everything going to ruin around them. Yet it fared even worse with the new gentry—I mean the servants who preferred to be landowners. The seeds were never put into the ground ; they were eaten instead. The cattle shared the same fate. After that the men were reduced to a condition of starvation. They came to their former masters and insisted on the observance of the contract which they had voluntarily broken. Neither party could now help the other. The Governor was threatened with lynch law, and the other gentlemen felt uneasy about their own necks. Under cover of night they effected their

escape from the settlement. In process of time most of the settlers got taken off to the other colonies ; where, if they are succeeding in life, it is by beginning at the right end, not at the wrong one. Now you have the history of the Swan River Settlement. It may come round again—who knows ? If it does, it will have to take a leaf out of your eastern settlements, young man !

“ You stuck to the ship yourself, Mr. Whitby,” I said, pointing to the flag-staff.

“ Not altogether. I tramped many a weary mile before I entered upon these here duties. You count it fifteen hundred miles from here to Adelaide along the south coast. Well, if you were to turn up this west coast and see it out, you would have compassed about twice the distance—say three thousand miles, roughly speaking. If ever you come to do that—and come to my time of life too—you may be glad enough of a quiet berth like this.”

I felt sure the berth was quiet enough, but I did not say so to Mr. Whitby. I wanted to get him on to this west coast instead. So I said—

“ And you made a tramp of all that, Mr. Whitby ? ”

“ Well—off and on ; now by boat, now by land ; occasionally driven back to recruit. The whole

thing came about in this way. You'll have heard of the *Beagle*—and Mr. Darwin?"

Yes ; we in the eastern settlements knew that Her Majesty's ship *Beagle* had been employed on a marine survey of this western coast of Australia, as also that Mr. Darwin was the naturalist of the expedition. I dare say most of my readers have heard a good deal more of Mr. Darwin since. But this by the way—and I let Mr. Whitby proceed, with an assent.

"Well, now, the *Beagle* brought out with her a gentleman, merely as passenger. This was Captain Grey, who, just like your own Captain Sturt, volunteered for Australian exploration, only he came direct from England—that was all the difference. The *Beagle* was to land him on the west coast, and was to render him any further assistance compatible with the proper duties of the marine expedition. That was shortly after the Swan River disaster, and I needn't tell you some of us settlers were glad to get a job which would take our legs out of it, more especially as the land party was to commence operations at the top of the coast, and work our way downwards.

"Accordingly the *Beagle* landed us in Hanover Bay, where her own duties would detain her for a considerable time ; which was a lucky thing for us,

as you shall presently hear. Not but we enjoyed ourselves in one of the most promising districts it has ever been my lot to traverse. We came across a splendid river, flowing through a country teeming with fertility and natural beauty. I am a pretty tall man myself, you will say. Well, if you'll believe me, the very grass was that high that it put me to my height to look over it, and a small man couldn't be seen a few yards off. Ah! we did laugh, calling to each other; and, mind you, not coarse grass, but rich and green, which our ponies devoured as if they never saw the like before.

"Well, it proved no laughing matter, after all. We met an accident—I do think it was an accident. The way of it was this. While we were larking through these beautiful river meadows up comes a small party of blacks. I don't think they were hostile, only surprised. But one of our men looking up and seeing them, made a run for it. That was enough, and the blacks sent a shower of spears among us. As bad luck would have it, one of the spears struck our leader, Captain Grey. He made light of it—said he would be all right soon—only suggested that we should explore the river by boat, where he could sit quiet. The *Beagle* had left us a boat, and we pulled up the river for seventy miles or so. We called it the

Glenelg, and the good promise continued all the way.

"But our leader got worse ; the wound would not heal, and we returned to the *Beagle*, when the ship's surgeon insisted on an abandonment of the land expedition for some time.

"When fully recruited in health, Captain Grey was minded to resume and complete his explorations at Hanover Bay. But the settlers remaining at Swan River, where he called in before starting, besought him to commence his operations at a point on the coast nearer to themselves. Consequently, Shark Bay, about half way up the coast, was selected. Misfortune dogged us still. We landed at Shark Bay with two old whaleboats, much the worse of the service they had already seen. On the very first day of our landing a storm arose. You've seen storms on sea, young man. But if you want to know how the wind can blow in from the sea to the land, you'll have to make experience of it on this west coast. We had no shelter but the two whaleboats, which we turned on side, and secured as best we could ; but we thought they would take flight, and get before us into the Interior. The poor sea-birds came about us and tried to secure footing on the shore ; they were that afraid to rise on the wing they let us

handle them. Then the sea rose, and took the whole of our stores with it in a return wave. We were left a little flour and some salt provisions—nothing to commence real operations upon. There was nothing for it but a hasty retreat back to Swan River. About halfway our boats became so shattered by the surf that we ran them ashore and took to the land. We were still three hundred miles from Perth, with neither provisions nor water by the way. You've had something of forced marches yourself. This was a run for life. There we were, in a long straggling line—thirteen of us; from morning to night no word was said; it was just as much as each man could do to stagger on and keep up with the party. At length we came across something in the nature of a well; only something like it, I say, for it was mud, and we had to strain it through our bags. Nevertheless, the men wouldn't leave it; they lay down, and said they might as well die there as anywhere else. Only for our leader, that would have been the end. He pushed on, reached Perth, and sent food and water by horsemen to our relief. He saved us all except one—poor Hoskins! I told you I had been off and on, on this west coast. We didn't accomplish much—we weren't let. But it's the makings of a great country."

Shortly after Mr. Whitby's discourse he had occasion to exercise his present proper functions in signalling the appearance of a barque bound for Adelaide. We left the few settlers of King George's Sound with a very lively sense of their kindness and hospitality, and in due time found ourselves again in South Australia.

CHAPTER IX.

A PEEP AT THE INTERIOR.

CAPTAIN GREY—who afterwards became Sir George Grey, and a Colonial Governor—the same happening to Mr. Eyre—had also been to Adelaide, and had told my old leader, Captain Sturt, and his fellow-settlers of South Australia what fair and encouraging prospects he had found on the north-west coast—as briefly related to me by Mr. Whitby. It was through no drawback of the region itself that he had been unable to follow these inviting promises. At the same time it was accounted a very far cry indeed from Adelaide to the north-west coast ; and if the way there was anything so inhospitable as Mr. Eyre now described the way to the south-west coast, there was no hope of immediate help in that direction. Not but the attempt has been

since made—and with success too. However, as I said before, I must not anticipate.

But, in truth, all such considerations and suggestions are now regarded as mere matters of detail. The principle remained, and ought to be worked out. In other words, the mystery of the interior had to be solved.

Such being the resolve, it goes without saying that Captain Sturt was regarded as the leader best and fittest for its accomplishment. True, the great Northern Expedition, which had ended in nothing, had been undertaken contrary to his expressed opinion. But then his own suggestion of a western route, though carried through, had been equally unproductive of practical results. What now, if Captain Sturt himself was to reorganise this Northern Expedition, and lead it to the solution of its task? Mr. Eyre had taken up Captain Sturt's proposition, and followed it out. Why should not Captain Sturt now take up Mr. Eyre's original suggestion, and prosecute it to its final achievement?

You see, the settlers of South Australia, lulled into some sort of quiet while there was an explorer in the field, now that Mr. Eyre and Captain Grey told their respective tales of profitless results, resumed their former fashion of public meeting

and discussion, the main line of suggestion being as I have just described.

Captain Sturt was nothing loth to entertain the proposition. But late results, though barren of fruits, could not be entirely ignored. Mr. Eyre had done all that man could do under the circumstances. It was not his fault, but his ill luck, that he got himself entangled among the many meshes of that mysterious Lake Torrens. "I would very much like to know what is on the other side of this lake," said my old leader. "Who knows but, if we got over that difficulty, the rest might be plain sailing enough? But Mr. Eyre has given us a warning which it would be presumptuous to treat lightly. Consequently, if I am to follow out my own views, I mean to give his Mount Hopeless a very wide berth."

Now Captain Sturt's own views were these. My readers may call to mind that, in our original trip down the Murray, we passed a very large tributary of that river, on the right-hand side, and apparently coming direct from the north. Captain Sturt's impression at the time was that it was a continuation and ending of our older acquaintance—the Darling—and such was now known to be the fact. Furthermore, Mr. Eyre, who had now returned to his Black Protectorate at Moorundi, reported that

the natives told him that the Darling, after proceeding about one hundred miles in a due northerly direction, was joined by a small tributary of its own, which they called the Williorara, and which, though small, was a mountain stream, always well supplied with water, and having herbage on its banks. To be sure, by this time, we had not much dependence upon blacks, especially Murray blacks. But here, at least, was an opening into the interior, and Captain Sturt determined to throw himself upon it.

It may be, this story of a mountain stream caught his attention. Such had been the Murrumbidgee—and great had been the result. I merely suggest—I know not, myself.

The new expedition hardly came up to the enthusiasm of previous ones on the part of the settlers: possibly recent failures had repressed that. Still, it was the best manned and best equipped exploring party I had yet seen. Besides our leader, Captain Sturt, there was Mr. Poole, who was second in command. As draughtsman, there was Mr. Stuart. The doctor and naturalist was Mr. Brown. I mention these names as they may perhaps be familiar to many of my readers. Of some of them I shall have to speak in the future. All told, we were sixteen in number. We had

eleven horses, thirty bullocks, two hundred sheep, and a boat.

From the boat, you might conjecture that our leader had some dim and distant visions of discovering a second Murray and founding another colony. But the boat was only meant to get us up the Murray and up the Darling as far as water passage would go. On this water-passage, Mr. Eyre accompanied us nearly the whole way. Notwithstanding his late hard experiences, probably the exploring spirit was still strong upon him.

Well, when we were done with the Murray, and the Darling, as far as the latter brought us in the direction we would go, we really did come upon the Williorara ; but only to practically understand how blacks can exaggerate and mislead. The Williorara was now the dry bed of a channel which possibly, at some season of the year, might contain a flow of water. The only water we now found was by digging down into this bed at its lowest points, where moistness still resided. As for the herbage on its banks, it was chiefly conspicuous by its absence, and, between this and the scarcity of water, anxiety soon arose as to the safety of the cattle.

This was especially the case with the horses,

which, during the passage of the main party up the banks of the Williorara, were taken by the heads of the expedition, accompanied by a few men, for long and exhaustive excursions toward the west. You are to understand that, through this detour by the Murray and the Darling, we had left the whole of the Torrens Lake district considerably on our left hand. But, though our leader had thus cleared himself and his party of the entanglement of that region, it was also part of his original intention to see for himself the nature of these shores, of which Mr. Eyre could only catch some dim and distant views from the heights of his Mount Hopeless, as possibly affording a key to the character and configuration of that interior he was ultimately in quest of. Hence our occasional swoops down on this country of mud, brine, and quagmire.

For it was the country immediately on the other side of this—*our side now*—which had its present novelty for us. It rose high and dry out of the lake district, as Mr. Eyre had partly observed. It was very uniform ; on every excursion to this lake district, we always passed through the same singular features, which I must now endeavour to describe to you.

Suppose to yourselves a great, boundless, un-

limited meadow, which has just been run over with the scythe, the swaths of grass now lying in pretty regular and parallel rows. Only there was no grass at all, not even a green thing, nothing but sand, sand, sand arranged in their interminable ridges. And all this on a most stupendous, and, in fact, Brobdignagian scale. Thus, the ridges were nearly as high as a man, about sixty feet broad at the base, narrowing to half that distance at the top.

At the very shores of the lake district, these ridges were suddenly chopped off, as with a clean cut, and we gazed down on that vast and level expanse of brine-pit and salty incrustation.

From this you may have some idea what a task it was to toil over these ridges and troughs of loose, hot, burning sand, giving way with each step, and flying in your face with every gust of hot wind, and smarting you very considerably. But, after all, it told most on the horses, for the district I am describing contained no forage at all, and, when we returned to the main party on the banks of the Williorara, there was not overmuch to recruit them. In fact, the further we proceeded with this promised inlet into the interior, the greater was the disappointment of our leaders. The expedition had started from Adelaide in the

winter, purposely to have the benefit of the spring's herbage for the cattle, when we got north. But the spring was now past, and summer was getting in upon us, when herbage most fails of all seasons of the Australian year, and we should be forced to go into such resting quarters as could be found.

In this manner—now pushing slowly ahead with the main expedition—now employed on these western excursions, and having run out the Williorara until all traces of it had disappeared, we came across a more broken and hilly country, to which was given the name of the Barrier Ranges, from the fact of our movements in all directions being impeded by high precipitous cliffs, or natural walls, crossing our paths. However, the region was fairly grassy, considering the very advanced period of the year—and, in parts, even picturesque. Beautiful plants, among them a great variety of creepers, the climatis, jasmine, clyanthus, were now in full bloom, and sent forth delicious perfumes, while the whole district was quite an aviary of birds, very tame and familiar. Often, while digging with a spade in the dry channels for water, the pretty "diamond" birds would light on the spade handle. Did they know what we were searching for, and request a share? But water, or

rather the absence of it, was our great drawback. Still, I suspect this Barrier region was a sort of Paradise in the desert, thus accounting for the presence of birds, for, outside it all was hot, barren, and dreary.

We were now on a level with Mount Hopeless, Mr. Eyre's furthest progress north, which he had fixed a little beyond the 30th parallel of latitude. Henceforth, if we advanced, we must leave the Torrens basin behind us. Hence our last and longest excursion westward, made through a repetition of scenes I have already described—interminable, well-defined sand ridges, with, here and there a patch, or strip, from which the sand had been removed, swept away, as it were, by the irresistible force of some torrent, leaving nothing but heaps of broken stones instead. In fact, it was as if the late Mr. Macadam had caused all the stones he ever broke to be carted out here and deposited in heaps. Strange, too, and contrary to this theory of watery agency, the stones were not worn or rounded, but sharp, and lying in isolated heaps, just as if a number of single rocks, deposited on the plain, had, by time and other natural action, decomposed into those fragments. And, yet, other appearances were strongly in favour of the old and long-cherished theory of an

inland sea. The Torrens basin, reached after a harassing ride of a hundred miles, remained unchanged. Again, and finally, we stood upon the top of the last sand-ridge, from whence it fell abruptly as on a bold sea coast. And what a sea we looked over! one dead low level of salt marsh and starved sandy scrub, stretching away to the horizon.

We regained the main expedition, to hear some pleasant intelligence—of which this last most exhaustive excursion placed us much in need. Before leaving the temporary encampment, Captain Sturt had directed one of the men to try ahead for a safe watering-place. The news we now heard on our return was that he had been successful, and, early in December, the whole expedition moved on to Flood's Creek. Flood was the name of our stockman, and our leader was so pleased with his good success that he conferred his name on the discovery.

Flood's Creek was splendidly grassed, fairly watered, and lay well in our northern route. Various wild oats, wheat, and vetches enlivened the scene, and birds and ground game were plentiful. We shot some emus and kangaroos, which varied our fare from mutton and damper.

Strange to say, even in such favoured spots as

Flood's Creek, and the Barrier Ranges, the natives were extremely scarce, and the few specimens of the most miserable and starved appearance! How horribly these natives suffer from hunger, and what prodigious quantities they eat when they get the chance! Though game in such choice localities abounded, their appliances for the chase were so wholly insufficient that they lived chiefly on seeds, which they rudely pounded, and still more rudely baked into a cake. Even the pods of the acacia, which to the unaccustomed have a most displeasing taste, they thus laid under contribution, and we always knew where the natives had been by their demonstrations among the wattle boughs.

But the way on was ever our pressing anxiety, and, during our short sojourn at Flood's Creek, Mr. Poole and the Doctor were ahead, investigating for a further advance northwards. In fact, it was now painfully apparent that the best-watered spots were rapidly losing their supplies under a summer's sun, and Flood's Creek could not hold out many days longer.

With their return came the order for a fresh start northward. Yet, we left Flood's Creek with some regret. In these distant and strange quarters, we had made some humble friends. The birds became wonderfully familiar. I suspect they were locked

up, like ourselves, and were glad of any little variety. The crows and owls—the latter in great quantity and quite day birds—came to know our killing time with the precision of clockwork, and fought and bawled over the offal. Others were much more melodious. There was a bird, about the size of a thrush, but of a more dirty dark brown whose great delight was to imitate all sorts and kinds of sounds. The men's whistling of tunes he paid special attention to, and hit them off to perfection; but, in fact, his powers of mimicry ranged over the whole biped world, fledged and unfledged; in a word, he could do everything but talk. Each morning, he ushered in the dawn from his bough with his loud, clear, metallic, yet soft, notes, and was an immense favourite with officers and men.

However, the abandonment of Flood's Creek was now imperative, and, besides, the account of our new quarters was decidedly favourable. Our advance party had spent no little time and labour in their search for a safe resting-place for us further north, and, in a country which they described as singularly unpromising, had the good luck to hit on this oasis in the desert, to which they gave the name of Rocky Glen.

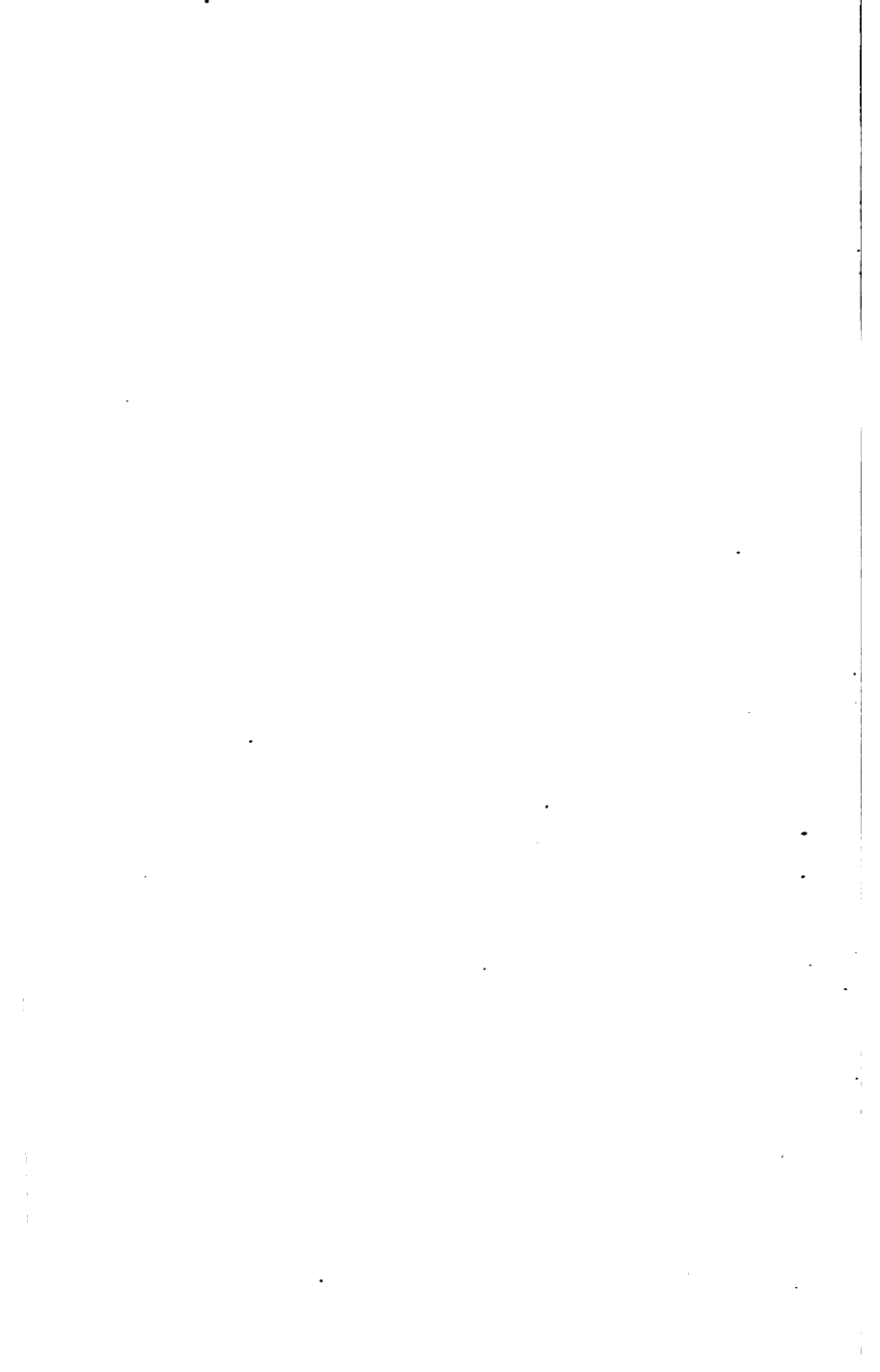
Rocky Glen was an advance of more than a

hundred miles further north than our last camp at Flood's Creek. We entered upon its occupation in the latter days of January, six months, wanting a few days of our departure from Adelaide. The Glen consisted of a broad and deeply watered creek, standing—of course I cannot say flowing: no Australian creek flows in summer—between the precipitous walls of a long defile, or gorge. A fine row of gum trees lined each side of the creek, or elongated lake which it really was; and still there was room in the gorge, so broad was it, for a plentiful supply of herbage, our one other indispensable requisite. A couple of miles to the right of us, was an eminence, which, in all probability, had attracted the attention of our officers to Rocky Glen. We called it the Red Hill; but, afterwards, in consequence of our saddest misfortune, amid much that sadly and sorely tried us, the name was altered to Mount Poolc. It was the one distinguishing feature of a region, which, all round, preserved a uniform and strict level, with the one exception of Rocky Glen. Even the Red Hill itself was clothed with sterility—if I may use the expression—to its topmost summit, its colour being derived from a thick layer of broken stones which covered it.

When we entered Rocky Glen, it was under the



THE RED HILL (AFTERWARDS MOUNT POOLE).



impression and belief that our stay there would be short—namely, until such time as our pioneers could hit on further safe progress for the expedition. But such was not to be. It was only when officers and men had advanced to the extreme limits of temerity—when every creek had been persistently, laboriously, and exhaustively run down, that the truth dawned upon us, and finally was admitted. Providence had led us to the one spot in these vast regions where life could be supported, and had there imprisoned us. Rocky Glen ended as abruptly as it commenced, and all beyond was, for the present at least, an inhospitable and forbidding wilderness.

Our commander was the last to bring the matter home to himself. He was not well—none of the officers were getting their health about this time. Those fearful excursions from the camp in search of water and a way north, were visibly telling upon them; though their efforts to conceal this from each other, and especially from the Doctor, who was no better himself, would have been amusing, if not sad and dispiriting to us all. But, well or ill, Captain Sturt was not the man to yield to difficulties, and, on this occasion, he redoubled his efforts to burst the bonds which were silently, but irresistibly, gathering around us. He spared

neither himself nor the cattle. Possibly he foresaw better than we did what imprisonment really meant. No doubt, too, the enterprise had so gained upon him as to make inaction now the most bitter and intolerable of all disappointment. Here was the fortunate hero of South Australia, sent by his fellow-colonists to pluck out the heart of the mystery of these central regions. It was almost within his grasp—already we were on the borders of Central Australia ; and yet here, instead, were months of idleness before him, with perhaps the loss of the party entrusted to him when the water failed.

Poor Punch!—he was the Captain's favourite horse. He never recovered from these terrible trials of his endurance. I have given you a brief sketch of one of our protracted excursions toward the west from the Barrier Ranges. Let me, as briefly, describe the last—our very last trial toward the east, ere we threw up the sponge, and sat down in Rocky Glen until the heavens relented, and the creeks flowed again.

There was only the Captain, Punch, and myself. We took as much water as the horse could carry, portions of which we had the precaution to leave on the way, to aid our return to camp. For, as such excursions were made to the extreme extent

of human and animal endurance, to attempt a return without such provision would be to face an impossible task. Thus, too, we lightened the horse's load.

Previous excursions toward the west had revealed the existence of an extremely low and level expanse of country, where the long and parallel lines of sand ridges had ceased, and where an ocean itself, in all but the water, lay beneath us. In fact, I knew that our leader was himself impressed with the opinion that he was not very far off the long-sought inland sea. For the present the north was closed against us, and, as far as investigation could reach, showed no cessation of sand ridges, though a very plentiful lack of water. On our right hand, however, that is, toward the east, there had been observed indications of a change in the character of the country. Hence the desire to a nearer and better acquaintance now.

The Doctor and Flood accompanied us a day's journey out of the camp, and were to meet us with supplies on our return, when we expected, and quite correctly, to be dead-beat.

On the next day after parting with the Doctor and Flood, we were somewhat cheered by the appearance of some curious flat-topped hills in the distance, and, toward evening, we were among

them. The country, too, had looked up a bit, though for water we were wholly dependent on what we brought with us. Fortunately for Punch, some rice-grass grew about the base of these hills. More fortunately for ourselves, its seeds had attracted a new kind of pigeon. We succeeded in shooting a few, the flesh of which furnished a delicious repast.

These flat-topped hills were chiefly composed of quartz, the detritus of which liberally strewed the intervening valleys and flats. Years after—I fear I cannot avoid these anticipations—when amid the “gold diggings” of more recent date, my mind has carried me back to these quartz hills of Central Australia. What if this region should be auriferous, too! But to resume:—

Water was what we really sought for now—not gold. With water we could return to the main expedition with light hearts, and tell it to come on. But we found no sign of the essential element. Gradually, too, the hills deserted us. We found ourselves in a succession of low, sandy flats, most toilsome to man and horse. The heat was now excessive, without possibility of shelter, or interposition from the sun’s rays; or, what was really worse, the hot atmosphere which moved in palpitating current over the surface. Take it all in all,

the region was the most glowing, and yet the most gloomy we had approached. All signs of life had disappeared, and the very stillness of death lay around us. Our poor horse rather tottered than walked, and at almost every step he threw me, who was at his head, into one of the low prickly bushes of spinifex, which alone found sustenance in the soil.

In fact, further advance appeared purposeless. The dreary monotony of country appeared as if it would never end. We were now more than a week from camp, and our supplies were all but exhausted. The Captain was about to turn when a small eminence appeared in front. We put forth what little strength we had to get a view from its summit. That view was decisive. Again our old enemies the sand ridges appeared ahead, not terminating abruptly, as on the western side, but stretching away until the horizon alone closed them round. We gave Punch a little water—it was all we dared spare—and his last pound of oats. Then we set about our return in earnest.

On our retreat to the camp at Rocky Glen, we skirted the previous hilly defiles, taking our way instead, through vast and apparently interminable plains. Toward evening we managed to get together a few small sticks, with which we lighted a

fire, and had some tea. But the poor horse would hardly let us be. He walked between and over us, sniffing at the cork of the keg, and endeavouring to gain an entrance for his mouth at the bung-hole.

A curious incident befell us on these vast and dreary plains. I have said no living thing was visible, and the noise of our light spring-cart alone interrupted the absolute silence. Imagine our surprise, then, when a number of black specks dotted the horizon, which, in an incredibly short space of time, developed themselves into a vast flock of kites. On and on they came in hundreds and hundreds, and actually swooped down upon us. The foremost stooped within a few feet of our heads—and then flung themselves away, after cyeing us steadily. Their attitude was bold, not to say defying; some of them approached so closely that they threw themselves back to avoid actual contact, opening their beaks and spreading their talons. Clearly, we were not what they had taken us to be—an easy prey. There was the will, but they lacked the nerve to come to closer quarters. What if they had? What could the two of us have done against such enormous odds? However, we kept a bold front—and they declined the contest. What of our horse though? What if the

poor brute fell, and we had to leave him, even temporarily, in search of water? I fear they would have made short work of him. However, they left us, and their long line of flight diminished into the heavens until it finally vanished again.

Yes, we were not their ordinary prey. We had been observing bird-life recently—and we were to have larger opportunities in Rocky Glen. Eventually it turned out to be the old story of the strong and the weak. The smaller birds had to follow water like ourselves—and these bigger birds were waiting to follow it.

Great was our relief when the figures of the Doctor and Flood appeared in sight. Even poor Punch plucked up his ears at the sound of their wheels.

I give this excursion, not as practically advancing the main purpose of the expedition in its progress northward, but as showing the incessant work thrown upon the leaders in opening the way ahead. That was our last sustained effort to escape from our prison, or, for the present, to take up the objects of the expedition. With its failure, leaders and men had to accept enforced inactivity. We then knew that nothing more was to be attempted until the skies relaxed—until there was a prospect of water and herbage in our desired direction again.

We were now two hundred and fifty miles from our final abandonment of the Darling, when that river had turned eastward. We had assured ourselves that, within practical reach, all round, there was no one other spot capable of sustaining life. Thus, we accepted the inevitable.

I have already said that the officers of the expedition were not maintaining their health. That grim and dreaded visitant, scurvy, had already put in an appearance. On the other hand, the men held their own wonderfully. The difference was explainable. The sheep thrive well — a sheep will nibble where a horse or a bullock will die of starvation: consequently, in the camp, there was always plenty of fresh and good meat. But the officers were rarely in camp — they had been thus scouring the country in all directions in search of a further safe advance; and, while on these excursions, their fare was a little bacon, and very indifferent water when they got any. Now, though a couple of men generally accompanied each leader, yet the same men were never taken out twice in succession.

The condition of Mr. Poole, our second in command, was now very serious. The disorder had obtained a complete hold over him, and, notwithstanding the Doctor's care and attention, he grew

worse rather than better. The other leaders kept their troubles to themselves. Men in the dull monotony of imprisonment like ours are only too prone to grow morbid and fanciful, and our commanders rather sought to enliven and encourage them with prospect of relief. But the illness of Mr. Poole was too serious for concealment of any sort.

Certainly the sheep were our mainstay, and gave us no trouble at all. They and the bullocks "minded" themselves. They went about the camp, and as far as vegetation extended, at will. Beyond that, there was really no inducement for them to go, and they knew it. When they were thirsty, they came to the creek to drink.

When we thus made Rocky Glen our unexpected home in the desert, it abounded in birds, even beyond our previous camping grounds. The crows and the owls made day and night hideous with their discord. The latter were bringing up a numerous young progeny; and, while the parents went in search of food, and more especially when they returned with it, the little owls kept up a din which drowned all other noises around.

Parrots and paraquets were in shoals. These pretty little paraquets were of all colours, red, green, blue, yellow, and each colour a vivid and lively tint. When a flock of these chatterers flew

into a wattle or gum sapling, the effect was extremely good. The tree absolutely glowed and sparkled as with innumerable gems, so bright and restless were the little creatures.

But there was a restlessness and activity not merely confined to the parrot tribe. It pervaded the whole of the bird world, during the early days of our acquaintance with Rocky Glen. Plainly, some movement was afoot—or, rather, on the wing. The birds all assembled in flocks, each strictly of its own kind. They flew up and down the glen, in an unquiet, fidgety state of preparation. Were they trying their wings for a long and sustained flight? We found the conjecture was only too true.

Outside these flocks were countless troops of hawks, which, ever and anon, dashed in among them, making sad havoc. These hawks were impudently daring even in the presence of the men; and thus their prey sought cover whenever they appeared. Alas! we thought what would be their fate when they encountered these large armies of kites which kept guard over these plains, where there was no cover, no shelter.

The men watched these preparations with a double interest, I might say a double anxiety. All doubts now disappeared—the birds were on the eve of a vast migration. They had come to Rocky

Glen for the water which it afforded, and they were leaving it because they knew that the water would fail. Thus—so we followed out the argument—they were migrating to a more secure and permanent watering-place. If we only knew where—and could accomplish a sustained flight thither!

One morning all doubts, if any remained, were dispelled. The vast assembly left the glen to ourselves, in perfect loneliness and silence. We watched the direction it took. The course was that of north-west. In that very direction had we met the kites on our last excursion. Practically, and at present, the information was useless to us. We had lately followed out that course to the extreme limit of putting our lives in danger—only to find a barren and forbidding prospect beyond. No doubt when the rain came there might be surface water to enable us to make a more sustained effort in that direction. It was not much to go upon, but we had to be satisfied with it.

On the whole the desertion of the birds did not tend to inspirit us—if they showed us a way, we knew that way to be closed against us. The heat, too, was becoming unbearable. Under its influence the screws were drawn from our boxes and fell out. All horn utensils, such as spoons, combs, and the like, split up into fine lamina. The lead dropped

out of our pencils. The ink thickened in the pen before it could be transferred to paper. The wool on the sheep ceased to grow ; the same observation applies to the hair on our heads. Our nails became as brittle as glass.

In fact, it came to this that overground we felt we should be stifled. We suggested an underground chamber, and our leader, nothing loth to see us employed, encouraged its construction. Here we took refuge during the hottest portions of the day. Here, too, the officers of the party did their work on maps and papers.

It might be with the like purport of keeping the men employed that Mr. Poole suggested another task. Or was it the curious fancy of a sick man ?

That gentleman was now entirely confined to his tent. His muscles had become rigid, and the skin over them quite black. So bad was the state of his mouth that he was almost precluded from taking nourishment. The other officers suffered more slightly, but, as I said before, they kept their ailments from each other. It was not until our commander himself was really and seriously ill that he made a confidant of the Doctor. While, as for the Doctor, he went away for a couple of hours every day and performed a series of gymnastics by aid of a rope and a wattle-tree, to keep his muscles

from getting into the same state as poor Mr. Poole's.

Our commander daily went to the sick tent to cheer and enliven the patient. Now, in one of these interviews, Mr. Poole threw out the following suggestion. I have told you that a considerable eminence overlooked the glen, to which we had given the name of the Red Hill ; as also that the whole hill was covered with loose, broken stone. Mr. Poole's recommendation was that a pyramid should be built on the summit with this scattered stone ; in case, when the heavens relaxed, and the way was open again, we might have a conspicuous object to recur to in order to guide our movements of advance or retreat. This work was carried out.

Thus month succeeded month and no rain fell. The creek—or rather the elongated lake in Rocky Glen, which was all that remained of a creek or Australian water-course—was plainly yielding to the weather and our demands upon it. When we took possession of Rocky Glen it furnished a broad and deep sheet of water. At parts it was nine feet in depth. Now this depth had dwindled to so many inches, and the water was found only in the middle of the channel, having quite deserted the sides. Our cattle had eaten up every green thing in the neighbourhood of the water, and now

roamed to a distance in search of food, which they never essayed before. Thus they never visited us unless when they came to drink. A terrible stillness reigned from day to day. The men watched the diminishing water, and speculated when the channel would become dry and baked, as were the various water-courses outside our now precarious home.

Visitors we had none, if I except one single black, who turned up suddenly one morning in a poor and emaciated state. His voracity was almost incredible. We supplied him with mutton until he ate up at a meal what would have served the whole camp on full rations. Then he went to sleep under one of the carts. So satisfied was he with his quarters that he evinced no disposition to leave them. He performed such prodigies on the mutton that we thought his tastes lay that way. But, on accidentally presenting him with a crow which we had shot, he evinced so decided a predilection for that form of food that we afterwards supplied him with crows.

I should explain that, while all the smaller birds, as also the whole of the parrot tribe, as well as many varieties of pigeons, deserted us on that especial morning, the crows remained ; the offal was to them a new, and doubtless irresistible, attraction ;

also some wading birds, to which I shall presently return, remained.

This native was friendly, and strongly inclined to be communicative, if we could only understand each other. He was acquainted with the uses of our boat, which we had brought on to Rocky Glen, pointing out that it was turned upside down, as so it lay. His face continued to preserve its poor starved appearance, but his body rapidly developed under the hospitable treatment he received. Very proud he was of the change in his condition. When he had thus brought himself up to his fighting weight, he evinced signs of taking his departure. We gave him presents, which he secreted carefully from view, so that we reckoned on his return ; but we never saw him more.

The other class of birds which stopped longer with us was a kind of stork, or crane. I have met them through all parts of Australia, and chiefly in the settled districts, where they are known as "native companions." They have, indeed, a dog-like affection for man, and this they soon developed in Rocky Glen. Not that they have any of the demonstrative affection of the dog. Nor are they in the least communicative, rarely uttering a note. One seems quite content as long as he is with you. There he stands on his two long, slender shanks

before you, or it may be on only one, possibly very happy, but looking the most forlorn creature in animated nature.

And yet there must be some deep-seated sense of humour in these birds. They never display it to man, only among themselves. Here, as elsewhere, they go in troops. A troop will settle down on a field, say in the settled districts, or on a plain in more remote districts, with all the sedate, not to say sad, demeanour proper to the birds. Guess, then, the surprise of the spectator when he beholds from fifty to a hundred of these gawky mutes suddenly, without the slightest rhyme or reason, break out into the wildest, maddest dance—up and down the centre—ladies chain—turn your partners—keep it up, boys—in fact, a veritable ornithological quadrille! Then it is all over, and the flock returns to its usual humdrum avocations. I have heard that the “corrobories” of the *real* natives is borrowed from this bird dance; but how true this is I cannot say.

We were now five months in our enforced quarters, and not a drop of rain had fallen! Such was contrary to all our reasoning and expectations. For Rocky Glen still preserved undoubted traces of former floods. Large saplings were still caught up in the boughs of the gum-trees which lined the

creek. Still, the birds had gone, and come, and actually gone again—and no change for the better appeared at hand. Was this, then, an exceptional season? and had the very birds themselves been deceived? Their second migration appeared to suggest such a thought; clearly, Rocky Glen was no place for them, and a second time they left it to our undisturbed possession.

Not but, from time to time, our hopes were aroused. Dark clouds rose above the horizon, and even passed over the glen. It thundered, and lightning lit up the Red Hill and the long defile which marked the course of the creek. But all passed off again; not a drop of moisture was added to its waters.

Mr. Poole had become much and seriously worse. His former patience gave place to restlessness. He begged to be taken from his tent to the underground chamber we had constructed. The nights were now bitterly cold; we were in the midst of the Australian winter. Our commander directed a fireplace and chimney to be built in connection with the chamber, and thither Mr. Poole was carried.

July is the month of Australian midwinter; and on July 11th a soft, close rain began to fall. We looked to some mighty breaking up of the

elements after this prolonged drought. Yet the change came gently, silently, but still persistently. All day long it rained. All night there was a quiet drip from the canvas of our tents. It was more delightful to us than the music of the spheres. In the morning the water in the creek was higher by some inches.

Our commander's programme of action was long laid for the event. The number of the party was to be reduced. Nine only were to compose the future expedition ; the rest were to return to Adelaide with Mr. Poole. Very painful was the task which our leader imposed upon himself: he had to break this intelligence to Mr. Poole. It was inevitable, though it was still bitter.

Everything was done for his ease and comfort. A chair was constructed with pullies, by which he could be raised into a sitting position when so inclined. All was ready for his departure by the middle of the month. Three continuous days' rain had now fallen, and, although it had ceased, there was water in the smaller creeks. The main expedition was to start simultaneously in the opposite, or northern, direction, and Rocky Glen was to be left to its native loneliness. The Doctor was to accompany the returning party for one day's journey, to see how Mr. Poole bore the

movement. He was then to come back to Rocky Glen, when the expedition was to resume its northern route.

Mr. Poole was lifted tenderly into the cart. Then the poor gentleman utterly broke down, and wept long and bitterly in the arms of our commander. "The separation was inevitable—he accepted it—but it tried him. May God bring you and the men entrusted to you safely back from the task you propose." After that he was got under weigh. Until then we hardly expected it was so bad with our second in command, nor even now did we fully recognise it.

On the following day the Doctor returned to Rocky Glen, and reported matters fairly well. We were ready for our start forward; indeed, we had made the start, when we perceived the returning party re-enter the glen. Mr. Poole had passed away gently soon after the Doctor had left him, and his remains were now brought back to the glen.

We buried him under the pyramid we had raised at his own suggestion on the Red Hill—in future to be known as Mount Poole. The nearest tree bears the inscription, cut deeply into the wood—"J.P., 1845." Then we made good our departure from Rocky Glen.

Our progress towards the Interior now lay through a succession of wide, sandy plains. The rains had entirely ceased, leaving, we were sorry to find, few traces of moisture on the surface of the country. Yet their effect was almost magical. Everywhere the young herbage was beginning to show itself.

Gradually these open plains gave place to our old acquaintances, the sand ridges. You may recollect we had met them on the east, and on the west, and here now they were on our main, or northern, route. We were much, too, incommoded by the want of water. The pure surface water, the result of the rains, had now sunk into the sands, and though, fortunately, the sand rested on a stiff, tenacious clay, which held what moisture descended to it, the process of arriving at it was slow and delaying, and the results insufficient for the wants of our party.

In the second week of our northern advance from Rocky Glen matters looked up a bit. We approached one of those park-like scenes which distinguish the better portions of Australia. This was so marked that our commander conferred on it the name of the Park Dépôt. Here it was his intention to establish a second head-quarters, like the former one at Rocky Glen, from which to

conduct his further operations northward. There was water and grass, both of which might be depended on to last through the remaining winter months ; any hopes beyond that period would be contrary to our present experience. Hence the necessity for more light, rapid, and unencumbered excursions ahead than the whole expedition was capable of.

The new arrangement was to be this. The Park Dépôt was to be left in charge of Mr. Stuart. A strong cattle-yard and stockade were constructed, into the latter of which the firearms of the party were to be brought. This stockade commanded the cattle-yard, so that, in the event of any predatory attempt by natives, our stock would be under cover of fire. No such precautions had been taken at our former quarters at Rocky Glen, because excursions from there were only of a few days' duration each, and were meant to ascertain means to bring on the whole party with safety. Here the excursion party was to do the whole work of exploration, having Park Dépôt to fall back upon when further advance became impossible for the time being.

In accordance with this, our leader, the Doctor, and three of the men, including myself, were to proceed ahead, with fifteen weeks' provisions.

"And, Morgan, look to the boat; have her repainted and caulked," were the parting words of our commander. Was this long-sought inland sea still in his mind? or did he meditate a rapid retreat on the Darling, should we encounter a stern repulse from this central regions we were now proceeding to invade?

I think the latter supposition was the more predominant one in our leader's mind. No practical precaution for our retreat was neglected. We procured no water until the second day of our departure from Park Depôt, and there he caused a well to be constructed. It was the old story—so many feet of sand, and then the stiff, tenacious clay, on reaching which a little moisture oozed out. It was not much; but who knows?—in a hasty retreat for life or death it might save our lives. That was our leader's view, and it was one of many instances of his foresight.

After another day's long and toilsome march we were so fortunate as to halt in a valley well grassed and with a good supply of water. However, we had sufficient experience of rapid changes, and left another well-hole behind us.

There was no such luck before us for the few succeeding days, during which we toiled over some very high sand ridges. At length, these gave

place to a level plain, about three miles across, after which we were delighted with the sight of the largest body of water we had yet seen.

First, we came upon a beautiful sheet of it, fully sixty yards broad. The whole expanse was covered with water-fowl, which remained unconscious, or indifferent to our presence. This sheet we traced for about one hundred and twenty yards, and the Doctor, with Flood, succeeded in finding a succession of similar ponds higher up. In fact, it was a veritable Australian creek—on large proportions—which, except in rainy seasons, rarely flows, and thus consists of a totally unconnected series of water-holes. On this our commander conferred the name of Strzelecki's Creek, in honour of a Polish nobleman, who had earned the respect and esteem of all Australian settlers by his successful labours in the development of a knowledge of the physical constitution of the country.

The pleasures of Strzelecki's Creek were short-lived. Under less pressing circumstances, it would have been interesting and possibly advantageous, to trace this series of water-holes up or down their main course. But the one would have led us to the east and the other to the west, and we needed all our time and strength to get as far to the north

as we could. Thus, after a day's rest, we left Strzelecki's Creek behind us.

The contrast was indeed marked. Hardly had we got a day's journey from the creek when we found ourselves buffeting the largest and most formidable sand-billows we had yet met. What a sight it was! Before, behind us, on our right hand and on our left, there stretched one vast ocean—not a green one but red—running mountains high with these solid and interminable sand-billows. Not that this ocean merely was red; no, the sky—the clouds overhead—had contracted the same hue; and, looking toward the horizon, it was difficult to believe that some vast conflagration was not raging there, everything in fact assuming this lurid tinge from the bare surface of red sand.

For six days we toiled over this weary and distressing country, depending for our very existence on a little precarious surface water, or, at best, a couple of small and brackish lagoons, which we fell in with at long intervals. Fortunately the sand ridges ran in parallel directions closely coinciding with the course we were on; so that only occasionally were we obliged to cross one when we found ourselves veering too much from the required track. Mainly, our course lay in the trough or furrow of this novel and extraordinary sea. Had

we been obliged to cross a succession of these formidable obstacles at right angles to their course—as had been the case in some of our previous excursions toward the west—we must have declined the task ; neither man, beast, nor light cart could have accomplished it.

A week's weary work ! And what did it bring us to ? A surprise even more unexpected than the sand ridges !

I have said that these ran on in parallel rows, day after day. No break, no gap in their dull and unyielding monotony. If there was change, it was to rise higher and higher above our heads. When, suddenly—without warning, without indication—they stopped ! We were on the edge of a great, a boundless, and this time a level plain, into which no sand ridge penetrated. There they were, cut short off, and abruptly. I have described something like this in those previous excursions we made to the Torrens basin, though here the cut was cleaner and more sheer. But it was the expanse now before us which was so wholly new to us. There, below us, at our feet, commenced this great and new expanse, and ended by the horizon only all round ; that is to say, from our right hand, till we came to our left hand round again, there was no interruption to meeting of plain and sky.

What was this plain? A most strange and curious formation. It was very low ; we had to descend from the furrows of the sand ridges to enter it. The whole surface was one uniform sheet of broken quartz, so closely packed together that no particle of vegetation could find its way through. Absolutely there was nothing but quartz, quartz, quartz ; and, as these stony fragments monopolised everything to themselves, excluding all possibility of vegetable or animal sustenance, so the very silence of the grave pervaded its level monotony. There was nothing to suggest a title to this singular region save its one uniform adamantine character, and hence it is known to the present day as Sturt's "Stony Desert."

Our first day's journey into this stone-clad level revealed no change. The noise of our own locomotion alone broke the universal silence ; we left no perceptible track behind us. The fragments of quartz were from one to six inches long, originally, perhaps, in parallelogram form, but now somewhat rounded by attrition—in fact, conjecturably water worn. Water, *now*, there was none, and we passed our first night in the Stony Desert without the aid of that refreshment. We had nothing to tie our horses to, but they kept quite close to us all night.

A second toilsome day's journey brought us to the opposite side or termination of this curious geographical feature ; but, even then, there was a fresh surprise in store for us. The Stony Desert suddenly descended to a still lower level—a narrow belt of scrub succeeded, about two miles wide ; and then there extended before us another dead level, equally devoid of all animal and vegetable life, and even of the very stones with which we had now made our two days' acquaintance. In fact, there was nothing now but earth, earth, earth ; and the whole region very much resembled a huge and boundless ploughed field, on which floods had settled and subsided. Indeed, so apparent was this to the whole party, that we straightway conferred upon it the title of the Mud Plain. The mud was now dried and cracked, and the floods, had betaken themselves elsewhere. Where? ay that was the mystery of these extraordinary regions. Anyhow, there was nothing to be got either in the form of water or fodder.

We calculated the distance over the Stony Desert, at the point of our crossing, to be thirty miles, and we proceeded through the Mud Plain on the same course, namely, a little west of north. We had given up being surprised at anything now, and we simply plodded on as best we could, having

no means of knowing whether we were getting out of our difficulties or deeper into them. In fact, even conjecture was set at nought ; there was absolutely nothing to be seen but earth and sky, with the line of horizon bounding us ahead.

The sufferings of the whole party were now great. Especially must this have been the case with our doctor. He said nothing, merely plodding on with both hands supporting his back, but it was plain that endurance had reached its limit with him. He was a young man, of an active and vigorous constitution, but past and present hardships were now too much for him. Our commander's concern on his part was evident to us all.

In our worst trials, down and up the Murray, officers and men endeavoured to keep up each others' spirits, and with success too. And, though our rations were certainly then limited, we had that requisite, water, in abundance. But when it comes to the verge of human endurance, all this ceases. Men then plod on in single file, perfectly silent ; all powers of mind and body are concentrated on the one object of getting over the ground.

Toward evening, we were somewhat cheered by a distant glimpse of some hills over the line of

horizon. It was only a glimpse, for they faded out and in ten minutes were invisible again. However, we managed to push on to a small water-channel, and were lucky enough to find some water in it ; along the bank, there were a few box-gum trees. It was now dark, but, climbing up the trees, we obtained another glimpse of the hills. Various were the conjectures as to their nature. They certainly cast shadows, and some of us thought we detected verdant patches in the hollows. Then all was dark night.

It was a bad night for us all. There was not a scrap of food for the horses, and the poor beasts kept gnawing the trees beside us. The night was bitterly cold, the thermometer marking freezing point.

We were on foot with the dawn, and hastened forward in the hope of procuring some food for the horses. Nevertheless, it was close on midday ere we came up with the hills. Imagine our dismay, our horror, when they turned out to be our old and familiar tormenters, the sand ridges ! The shadows were the result of one ridge intercepting the evening light from another. The verdancy was, I fear, entirely on our own part. It is impossible to depict the effect of this discovery on leaders and men. We had now run down these sand

ridges for over six degrees of latitude, a matter of some three hundred and fifty miles. We thought to see the last of them with the Stony Desert, and here they were with every former feature renewed. Just a gap of fifty miles, and then they rose abruptly before us, and resumed their dull, monotonous parallelism, and in the very same direction too. For all we knew to the contrary, they might proceed on thus to the Gulf of Carpentaria itself.

However, our feelings and speculations must now yield to the absolute wants of our dumb companions. We were bad enough ourselves in all conscience, but they were on the point of starvation.

As these rows of sand ridges proceeded in a direction closely coinciding with our own, namely, N.N.W., we passed up a valley between two of them, for about four miles. Here, the valley slightly deviated, and we crossed the sand ridges to regain our proper course. When on top of the ridge, we sighted an apparently considerable forest of the box-gum, closely ahead of us. We proceeded some distance through this woodland strip, though still without meeting any herbage ; in fact, the surface of the ground was a mere clay of a whitish colour, quite bare but for the trees. However, had our more urgent wants been supplied, we would have

derived pleasure from the ever-increasing bird-world which here filled the whole woodland with its wild notes. It was the first specimen of bird life we had witnessed since we had entered upon the awful stillness of the Stony Desert, and we were quite surprised with its profusion.

Toward evening, we were cheered by the sight of a large creek, with plenty of couch grass in its channel, but no water. Leaving the horses to feed, we hastened up its course, and, underneath two forest trees growing in the channel, were fortunate enough to come across a large native well. This well was twenty-two feet deep, and was eight feet broad at the opening. The water was very low down indeed, and what little there was of it was slightly brackish. However, we were not disposed to be fastidious.

We could now understand the presence of this bird-world. They came to the water, and they had to dive down this considerable distance, which they did with dexterity and success. Evidence of natives lay all around—grass-seeds, which they principally fed on, stones with which to pound them, and broken boughs ; but we saw none. Here, we made a halt, and much needed rest, for the night.

With the morning, we resumed our original

course, and, at the distance of about a mile emerged from this box-gum forest. That is to say, the trees ceased, but the bare, earthy nature of the soil continued.

This cessation of plant life had brought about other changes. An almost vertical sun, unimpeded by shade, had rent this plain into cracks and fissures of considerable size and depth. I have already mentioned so much that is gloomy and forbidding, that, on the present occasion, I shall content myself with the statement that this was the most difficult bit of navigation we had yet essayed. These cracks descended to a distance of ten feet into the ground, and were so numerous that the horses had great difficulty to avoid them, the clay falling in with a hollow rumbling sound as into a very grave.

At the end of six miles of this laborious and risky travel, the plain was terminated by the channel of a small creek, containing some grass, but no water. Here we were delayed by the alarming illness of the horses. They were swollen, and appeared in great pain. We made a halt for the day, and examined the creek up for water, fortunately with some success. On our return, the sufferings of one of the horses had increased. He threw himself on the ground, and, to prevent injury to himself, we took the precaution to tie him up.

However, toward evening, we again loosed him, and he wandered up the creek. In the morning, he was nowhere discernible, and, after fruitless search, we were obliged to resume our course without him. He was always a rambler, and rarely kept with the other horses.

Eventually, this horse found his way back to Adelaide again. We were now close on 1,000 miles from that settlement, even as the crow flies, while our detour by the Murray and Darling had imposed as much more on us ; and, supposing he took that more direct route, he must have crossed the Stony Desert, and found his way through many another difficulty of that strange region.

Our course being still N.N.W., and that of the sand ridges a little more west, we were obliged occasionally to cross them, which added considerably to the distress of man and beast. Briefly, on the last day of August, and now fifteen days from Park Depôt, we halted under our most depressing, and even critical, circumstances. There was no further prospect of rain falling. Hardly, in case of a retreat, could we depend upon water along the way, until we made good the native well we had left in the forest. But could we depend upon that ? It was very low when we saw it four days back—such as it was, it had only furnished half-allowances for the

party, and our daily experience proved to us that all surface water was now rapidly evaporating. The wheels of our cart, too, were quite dislocated by the broken, cracked nature of the soil we had been traversing, and a day's delay became absolutely necessary for repairs.

Wearily we stumbled through twenty miles on the following day, to find ourselves at a couple of small and very muddy puddles. Our good genius Flood, however, who strayed ahead, while we endeavoured to separate these mixed elements into their component parts, came back with reassuring accounts. He had seen both water and grass. In fact, while we lost our labour over these puddles, we were in the neighbourhood of a beautiful creek, able to supply man and beast. Captain Sturt conferred the name of my late commander, Mr. Eyre, on the welcome discovery.

We followed Eyre's Creek up for about ten miles on the next day, still finding water and grass, though our now constant attendants, the sand ridges, hemmed in both sides of the channel. Eventually, the creek died out on some flats, and we found ourselves taken somewhat out of our course by its inducements.

Resuming our proper northerly course these flats conducted us to a small, shallow lake, stocked

with wildfowl, but of too briny a nature to be attempted by man or beast. We made a halt under a sandhill, sixteen miles from Eyre's Creek, but the surface-puddles could not be made to yield us a drop of water. The prospect from the top of the hill itself was dispiriting in the extreme. To the west and north-west of us stretched away lines of heavy sand ridges, so steep and rugged as to put all attempts of traversing them out of the question. Turning to the north and north-east a dark green plain met our observation, covered with samphire bushes, and, among these latter, some dry beds of lagoons, perfectly white and curiously contrasting with the green of the bushes. This plain extended for about eight miles, and had its boundary in some more distant hills. We could just catch their red tops flaming in the now fading twilight of evening. When darkness closed around us, we could only speculate what the operations of the morrow were to be. Were we to still forge ahead, or confess ourselves beaten?

With early dawn our poor doctor was astir. He brought back the news that he had certainly taken up the channel of a dried creek—could it be the continuation of Eyre's Creek? These creeks do die out on flats or plains, and afterwards resume their course in some mysterious way. We were

soon ready to try for ourselves, for our morning's preparations were of the lightest. There was neither food for the horses nor water for us or them.

Whatever might have been our day's decision I think the Doctor's discovery brought us more rapidly and conclusively to it.

The creek led us out to the Samphire plain we had vaguely discerned on the previous evening. Its channel was perfectly white, and to all appearance as perfectly dry. Absolutely in the morning's sun its incrustations of salt glittered, and had the appearance of broken or rotten ice ; and every blade of herbage was thickly coated with the like covering. On a nearer examination these incrustations of salt, about four or five inches deep, we found to rest or float on pools of brine. Finding neither aid nor encouragement from the creek we turned our attention to the neighbouring sandhills.

From their summits we obtained a tolerable view, but it was no more encouraging. We were again in the thick of the sand ridges. On their long rows ran as far as line of vision would follow ; nor sign nor symptom saw we why they should not be interminable. We descended again to have counsel with our commander. On these, and such cases of extremity, he took us wholly and unre-

servedly into his confidence. When leadership is at fault, one opinion is as good as another, and every man has the right to elect whether he shall go on a forlorn hope.

It was as if the very horses, too, would join in the consultation with us. They thrust in their heads among ours; and, taking us altogether, we formed as singular a council of war as ever looked disaster and distress in the face. If *their* verdict would find voice—and it was eloquent in all but that—it would say, "Gentlemen, let us get out of this as quickly as we can."

Should we go on and find water—good. We should have accomplished our task, and mystery should no longer enshroud these central regions. But if it fared otherwise with us—then, assuredly, no generalship, no endurance, could save our bones from bleaching in the wilderness. That was what our commander had to say to us—and then he was at our own disposal.

But we were not to be out-done in generosity. Where he led, we would go. It was his to command, and every man stated his resolve to obey to the end.

After that, Captain Sturt returned to the hill and sat there for the better part of an hour, sweeping the horizon all round with his telescope, and

dwelling long and lingeringly on every point of it. Then, slowly and sadly, he came down from the summit; and we knew that the terrible responsibility had been too much for him. We were to return.

The decision must have cost him much. He thus turned from his task with a feeling of bitter disappointment. He was, at that moment, scarcely a degree from the Tropic, and within a hundred and fifty miles of the centre of the continent. If he had gained that spot his task would have been performed, his most earnest wish would have been gratified. This is a mere paraphrase of the words to which our commander committed himself, and his decision has since been universally upheld.

If my readers will look at a map of Australia, very near the centre, but not quite, they will find these words: "Sturt's furthest, September 8, 1845." That is the spot which I have been endeavouring to give you some faint idea of in the few preceding pages.

Well, the word retreat is easily written, and its necessity on the present occasion was received as regretfully by men as by officers. Men—ay, very humble men, come to take as lively an interest in extreme ventures of this nature as their leaders.

In fact, retreat was just a shade less desperate than advance. We were now four hundred miles from our companions at Park Dépôt. Our horses had tasted neither food nor drink since the early dawn of the preceding day, and we were thirty-four miles from that portion of Eyre's Creek where alone we could make the least offer to their importunate wants. The men were all ill—our doctor painfully and alarmingly so ; no one who has not seen scurvy in its worst stages can form an idea of its distressing character.

The very region seemed to reject us. As we turned our backs upon it, the wind howled and blew in gusts about us. To all intents and purposes we were enveloped in a snowstorm, only for snow you must substitute the white incrustations of salt which fell in showers around, and the wind, instead of being a wintry one, was a hot summer's blast, coming, as it were, from a very furnace. As we turned to take a last look—to seaward, as I might, without any very great violence to propriety, say—what a sight ! Yes, these solid and interminable billows—the fierce and fiery blast, pouncing on their crests, and then sending up their loose sand in columns of spray—all constituted such an ocean scene as man could not, I believe, elsewhere survey. Just then a flight of

crested paroquets whirled over our heads, coming from these inhospitable wastes, and hastening with rapid wing in the exact direction of our own retreat. How strange! Ever from the Rocky Glen—ever from the time our solitary native there had pointed to the boat and then to these north-west regions, we had followed with unerring precision this migratory course of birds. Where did they go to—what was the inducement—and why did they now hasten, like ourselves, to retrace their flight, with the presumed object, also like ourselves, of finding water? Our only answer was to follow on this course as best we could.

Eyre's Creek again proved an acceptable halt to man and beast. It was on that occasion, and not on our first discovering of it, that Captain Sturt conferred upon it the name of my recent leader. We gave the horses a good rest—there was still terrible work before them and us—and, while they regained a little of their exhausted strength, we plodded about the neighbourhood and examined into its resources. Our commander was of opinion that Eyre's Creek might be made the depôt, or headquarters, of a well-equipped, and not exhausted, party to explore the Interior; and this he would have impressed upon future explorers but for a fresh discovery, which the reader will find

a few pages further on, and which he recommended in preference. With the result of that recommendation it will be my duty to close this narrative. With what success and with what sad sacrifice it was acted on the reader will, in its proper place, learn.

Thus it was that we did not regain our companions at Park Depôt until the second day of October, after an absence of seven weeks, and a most distressing excursion, there and back, of nearly a thousand miles.

We found all well. The works of our commander carefully executed and maintained ; the sheep in appearance better than we had ever seen them before ; but, whether the fault was theirs or ours, the mutton insipid and flavourless.

This was the most protracted—the most exhaustive—effort to ascertain the real nature of the interior of the country which had been yet made or even imagined as possible ; and our commander might well rest satisfied with the care and foresight with which he had led it, and the ready endurance with which he had been followed. But we knew him too well to suppose he would retire on these results. Questions had arisen which not even the original organisation of the Expedition had contemplated. What was this Stony Desert ? Was

it really a vast waterway, fifty miles broad, which only an unprecedentedly dry season—for, except for three days in July, the whole winter had passed without rain—had left without water? These questions he would clear up. I believe when he came down from that hill on September 8th he knew that for him this Interior was forbidden ground. But his own Stony Desert he would track, or he would die for it.

But the Doctor he would save first. We had lost Mr. Poole, not through any dallying with the time; his escort had started with the first of these July rains. But, if the way was still open, the Doctor, with a sufficient escort, was to fall back on Rocky Glen, and thence find his way down the Darling and Murray to Adelaide.

Firm and resolute as our commander was, I think he rather shrank from the announcement of this resolve. We heard nothing of it for some days, and then its communication to the Doctor himself reached me by way of accident.

These two gentlemen had concluded their dinner, and I had brought them in their tea—our only and constant beverage at meals when we had the luck to procure the necessary element of water for it.

“I am afraid, Brown, you have misunderstood the object of my return to camp.”

The Captain spoke in a low tone, and was nervous and ill-at-ease.

"You have done all that you were sent out to do."

"True. In a literal sense I have now complied with my instructions. The object of the North Exploring Expedition was to ascertain the existence of a dividing range inside the Tropic. I think we both can safely say there is none such."

"Nothing but sand ridges."

"Exactly. And you know my theory is that so far from an elevated tableland, the whole district is below sea level, from thence to the Gulf of Carpentaria."

"You cannot advance any further; we all did think that when you gave the order to return."

"So did I. I fear I go back to Adelaide with the confession that I have yielded to a hard, but inexorable, fate."

"In what, then, have I misunderstood you?"

"You must go first. You must go back and tell them that."

"Ask me to do anything else, and I will do it. I cannot desert you."

Then there was some silence, and both the gentlemen appeared to be occupied with their own painful feelings.

At length the Captain resumed.

"Let me put my case fairly before you, Brown. I have some reputation at stake. Why should I hesitate to say that every colonist in the country—the whole geographical world outside it—are waiting to hear what I have got to say? Now, I have not satisfied myself as to much that I have seen—how, then, can I satisfy others? I have got my duties here still. The first of my duties is to command your return."

After that there was complete silence; and I know not whether these two gentlemen renewed a conversation which was becoming so different from their ordinary and most friendly communication. But next day we were told the new arrangement. Who first gave way I cannot say—rather, I fancy, the compromise was a mutual one. It was this. Mr. Stuart was to accompany our commander, and the Doctor was to take charge of the depôt instead until their return. The two leaders were to take two men, myself and Morgan, and we were to be furnished with ten weeks' provisions. The heat was now rapidly increasing, in fact, we were in our second summer since we had left Adelaide. Under these circumstances it was doubtful if the water in Park Depôt would hold out until our return. In case of failure, the Doctor's instruc-

tions were to fall back on Rocky Glen and there await us.

We made our start on the 9th of October, the thermometer then registering 106° in the shade. Four pack-horses carried our simple provender, consisting of little more than flour and tea. Besides these, each officer and man had his horse. Our commander had his own, Duncan. Punch, who had now sufficiently plucked up, after his last terrible excursion, he allotted to me. The Doctor had generously given his horse in charge to Mr. Stuart ; it was better and fresher than his own ; and Morgan had the roan. All these horses looked well ; but, in reality, they had little lasting in them. The wretched herbage, tops of bushes, and plants, which had so long been their fare, while it put up soft flesh, communicated no hardening qualities.

Our course of proceedings was to retrace our steps to Strzelecki's Creek, and then to depart on a new course to the right, in fact, due north ; so that, if the Stony Desert really had an extension in that direction, we might strike it.

On the second day, about noon, we made Strzelecki's Creek. Notwithstanding the advance of the season, the water was far from exhausted. By evening, we had worked our way about seven

miles up the course of the creek, which was still northern. On either hand of us as we proceeded, at irregular distances from three to six miles, were low sandhills.

On the following day, we journeyed from dawn to dark, through vast plains without water. At night we halted under a small sandhill.

With the first light we hastened to its summit, to survey our prospect. We were still among the large plains we had traversed on the preceding day, with some ridges of sand running through them, but at considerable distances from each other. Another sandhill rose about four miles ahead of us, after which we traversed an open box-gum forest, arriving unexpectedly at the banks of a magnificent water-course. Here, there was an abundance of green grass, and, for the sake of the horses, we made a halt for the day, determining to explore our new acquisition up and down. As we proceeded in our task, the stretches of water appeared to increase in size and breadth. Presently, we came across one which was fully two hundred yards from bank to bank, and covered with wild-fowl. The prospect here was really grand, the succession of reaches of water being lined on each side with splendid forest trees, reflected in the placid liquid below. I and Mr.

Stuart managed to get sufficiently near to the wild-fowl, and shot three fine ducks. After that, the flock took to flight; but our commander, not to be outdone, seized a gun as they flew over his head, and down came another. I had not seen him perform such a feat for many a long day before. Thus, we had a duck apiece, and deliciously it contrasted with our ordinary simple fare of tea and damper.

Our evening repast was a fitting occasion to confer a title on our new discovery. Our commander named it Cooper's Creek, in honour of the judge of the Supreme Court of Adelaide.

There was even question whether such a discovery should not modify the original intention of the expedition. True, in fulfilment of that purpose, we were now proceeding due north, while the course of the creek lay east and west. Still, so important and unexpected a water-way might lead to something, and, as long as it continued, we should at least have water; whereas that essential threatened to be the great want of our northern route. Just then the sky darkened, the thunder rolled over our heads, and a plentiful shower fell. The event decided the question. For some days, at least, there would be a few pools of surface water remaining, and our northern

course was resumed. After all, we knew too well the precarious and treacherous character of an Australian water-course. Finely as Cooper's Creek promised now, it might leave us in the lurch on the next day's journey.

Accordingly, we resumed our northern course in the morning ; and, getting over some thirty-six miles, halted at night at two small puddles of rain water. Here, before resting, we took the precaution to dig a well, into which we drained the surface water. The supply was inconsiderable, but it might save our lives for all that.

We were now getting steadily among our old acquaintances, the sand-ridges. Water was becoming terribly scarce, and it was night—fortunately a moonlight one—before we halted at another wretched surface puddle. Nevertheless, we rested not until we had dug our second well.

It was quite plain that we would derive no further assistance now from the thunderstorm which had fallen four days before. Our journey to-day was rewarded with a sight of a small lake, but the waters emitted an offensive effluvium, and the horses would not taste them. Nevertheless, we constructed a well—our third—a little distance from the margin of the lake, in the hope that the filtration of the water might improve its quality.

Next morning we found to our disappointment that this was not so. The water seemed to derive its distasteful qualities from the earth itself.

The horses were now in a very distressed state, nor were the men better. We came across the dry bed of a small creek with some grass in it ; but the horses would not eat. Toward evening we discovered a pool where there was some very muddy water, and here we dug our fourth, and last, well.

On the tenth day of our departure from the depôt we found ourselves again face to face with the Stony Desert. We were now just fifty miles to the right, or east, of our former encounter with this singular geographical feature ; so that all doubts of its having a certain continuance were placed at an end. Nor did we perceive any alteration in its prevailing characteristics, as, for the second time, we entrusted ourselves to its awful stillness.

On the opposite side, however, there were some changes to record. Previously, on our crossing the Stony Desert, it may be recollected, we encountered a narrow belt of trees, after which, on a still lower level, we came upon that extraordinary feature, the Mud Plain. Now these were absent ; and, instead of a lower level, the country rose before us, assuming heights of one

hundred and one hundred and fifty feet, with valleys between. But the newest feature of all was that these heights derived their character wholly from the Stony Desert at their base, being covered with the same quartz fragments up to their very summits.

Our condition now was one of great distress. We were fifty miles from the last place at which we had procured water, and we hardly hoped to bring back the horses in safety. All hopes ahead had entirely vanished ; the very nature of this stone-clad country precluded the probability of finding relief.

I know our commander took this view of the matter ; yet his stay on the hill was long and anxious. Again, he sought for the least encouragement in the prosecution of his task, but nowhere was it to be found ; and, finally and absolutely, we got the order to retire from these inhospitable wilds.

We returned through one of those depressions, or valleys, between two stone-clad hills, where we had halted on the previous evening. At the head of the valley, poor Traveller, one of the pack-horses, fell dead. We feared the Colt, another of them, would share the same fate. With great difficulty we brought the animal on to the middle of the

valley, but beyond that our efforts failed. Two of us proceeded ahead in search for water, the other two remaining with the horses. Our search was vain. In the meantime Morgan came up, having left the Colt a mile behind. Just then a single pigeon, the only bird we had seen since crossing the Stony Desert, flew over our heads, and dipped towards the plain about a quarter of a mile further on. Morgan's quick eye caught the bird's contact with the earth, for it was up again in a moment, and soon vanished into space ahead. "There is water there," he said. He was right—the bird had barely dipped its bill in the moisture, and had then resumed its flight. We succeeded in bringing on the Colt, and then had a halt for the rest of the day.

With early dawn we retraced the Stony Desert for the last time. Owing to our *détour* on the preceding evening in search of water, this was the most extreme eastern point on which we had yet struck it. It was broader here, and was pursuing a more northerly course. There were other changes, too. On coming upon it now, its appearance was like that of an immense sea beach. Large fragments of rock were embedded in the ground, and there was much to suggest the violence of some force of water at a period not remote. The stones, too,

were more scattered, showing beds of sand beneath and between them.

These were the appearances on the surface as we passed. In truth, our passage was one of flight. We were still over one hundred miles from Cooper's Creek, where alone we could depend upon water and food for the horses. What little we might fall in with in the mean distance must be poor and precarious ; though, without its assistance, our attempt was a doubtful and even desperate one.

After recrossing the Stony Desert we reached our first well—that is, our last one on going out. There was still water, but it was horribly thick, and, in the morning, so offensive that men and horses turned from it.

We knew this would be our fate with our second well ; it had proved itself unfit on the journey out, and a day was now making terrible difference. Nevertheless, we pushed desperately on, for the sake of the little herbage which was there. Our sole dependence was now on our last well—that is, the first which we had dug on leaving Cooper's Creek, and about thirty-five miles ahead of it. If this assisted us we might reach Cooper's Creek. If not—but there was no time for conjecture.

We gave the horses an hour's rest ; and then, at eight o'clock in the evening, we lit our lantern, and

continued the forced march. One man proceeded ahead with the lantern; by its dim and uncertain light the rest followed. What a sight we must have presented, if any native chanced to occupy these solitudes! and what strange tales of an *ignis fatuus* he must have brought back to his tribe! But we saw nothing save these vast solitudes themselves, and our thoughts were bent on the task of putting them behind us through daylight and dark. Thus we neared our last remaining hope. What would it tell us?

Our commander was ahead. You will recollect that we were now in search of our first halt, after we had left the creek a good day's journey. We had there found two small surface pools of water, in the immediate neighbourhood of a pretty large clump of trees. In the grey dawn our leader thought he saw the trees. Then it lightened, and he called out, "Water, water!" Yes, he certainly saw the glitter of water. We were saved. We had thought lightly of this first well in the wilderness, and it was the best we had found. Possibly the trees may have helped to ward off the sun's power, for the surface water was still there, and that was what our commander had seen.

We had a good halt and then pushed on for Cooper's Creek, which, however, we did not reach

till midnight. Our numbers, too, were diminished. The Colt and the Roan had both fallen ; but, next day, we brought them assistance, and got them safely on to the creek.

That was a terrible day, even on the creek ; and, had it assailed us in the wilderness, we must inevitably have perished. In the morning the wind from the interior—that is, the hot wind—began to blow ; and, about midday, it raged with awful violence. The leaves of the trees along the creek became crisp, and fell like a snow shower around. Blinding torrents of fine sand, driven before this fiery blast, were poured over the whole district, smarting and blistering our feverish skin. Man and beast turned from the scorching glow ; the poor horses were not able to bear the weight of their own heads ; propped up against trees, their noses touched the ground. A thermometer, graduated to 127°, burst from the excessive heat, though placed in the fork of a tree for shade. An all-pervading and irresistible languor took possession of us, and we had to let things be until this fury of the elements abated.

We reached Park Dépôt to find it deserted, as we fully understood it would be. The doctor's instructions on this head were imperative, if the water showed signs of failing ; and a letter, lodged

in a concerted place, awaited our commander to this effect. We reached the Rocky Glen, and rejoined the main party without any incident worth recording.

Then, for the first time, our commander threw up the sponge. What wonder! He had been the leader in every party, in every excursion, while the others had taken alternate rest. The day after our arrival in Rocky Glen he took to his tent, and became perfectly prostrate. His skin, too, blackened, like Mr. Poole's, and the least movement put him to torture.

Our position now at Rocky Glen was perhaps as precarious as at any period during this protracted expedition. It was now November. Was the way still open to the Darling, or were we to be shut up for another summer in the glen? The very thought was horrible to us.

Now, the nearest water we could possibly expect on the journey down would be at Flood's Creek, one hundred and fifty miles from the glen. If water was still there, the way was open. If not, the journey could not be attempted. Was the whole expedition to be moved on this slender chance?

Our doctor was ready with his proposition. He would tell us the condition of Flood's Creek, and

he would do it in this manner. The hide of one of our large oxen was sewn into a strong water-bag. This was filled with water, and a small party of men conveyed it seventy miles on the way to Flood's Creek, and left it there. Then, on the following day, the doctor, taking our light spring cart, and thirty gallons of water more, started on his perilous journey. Thus, supposing the creek to be dry, he would have a reservoir of water to fall back upon, half way, in case of such a sad emergency.

On the eighth day, when we expected he would put in a reappearance, we were all on the look-out for him, excepting our commander, who could not be moved. We all rushed to our commander's tent to tell him that Dr. Brown had appeared in the distance. Presently the doctor himself stood in the midst of us.

"There is still water in the creek—but that is all I can say. What there is, is as black as ink—and we must make haste, for in a week it will be all gone."

All was now despatch. A bed of leaves was placed in one of the carts, into which our commander was carefully lifted, and the expedition commenced its retreat from Rocky Glen.

Flood's Creek was reached in safety ; and the

water still remaining there enabled us to push on to the Murray. Already the blacks of the Darling and the Murray had carried the story down that the expedition, now nineteen months absent from Adelaide, and supposed to be lost, was on the return. The wealthy settlers of the Murray hastened to place their carriages at the service of Captain Sturt and his party. A midnight moon saw us threading the labyrinths of clustering vineyards and golden cornfields which already encompassed the city our commander had founded; and thus we arrived at his own residence.

The rest of the party were taken on to the city itself, and hospitably allocated for the night.

CHAPTER X.

MR. AMBROSE.

IT is about time I took my readers to some more pleasant and promising scenes than those I have been lately describing. And this is specially that portion of my story when I may be allowed a little breathing time, and say something about the actual progress of settlement, instead of hurrying ahead in search of new lands and new fields for enterprise. For, as may be naturally conjectured, the result of our last expedition caused quite a lull in the exploratory spirit of the settlers. Not that new lands were not wanted, nor that the mystery of the interior by any means lost its spell. No—there was the desire for information still. But who was to make a more sustained and successful effort, when Captain Sturt himself had failed? Our commander had done everything, except to lose the men entrusted to his care—and

it was thought wise to pause before a merely curious geographical problem was pushed to more extreme lengths.

That is one of my apologies for this short chapter. But, as in time this spirit of exploratory enterprise did revive, and that perhaps in its more curious aspect of clearing up a mystery, I ought to say something of its new head-quarters, which was neither in Sydney, nor in Adelaide, nor in any place I have previously mentioned. In fact, I must tell you how there came to be a Melbourne, and how the district of which Melbourne is the city, though the very smallest of all Australian settlements, came, in a wonderfully short space of time, to be at the head of Australian industry and enterprise.

Now, it may be called to mind that when we took that original trip down the Murray, we found that river to cut off a portion from the continent, bounded by its left bank as we went down stream. We had neither time nor opportunity to examine that portion—we knew it merely as the Port Philip District of New South Wales, which, as I said before, ruled supreme over all Australian lands.

Of the district itself little was understood. The existence of the Murray was unsuspected, and

Port Philip, though a capacious bay more than forty miles long, has a peculiarly narrow entrance.

As usual its discovery came rather from the land than the sea side. Mr. Mitchell, who was the Surveyor-General of New South Wales, happened to be following the Darling down stream to ascertain if Captain Sturt's conjecture of its joining the Murray was correct, and, finding this to be a fact, he crossed to the opposite bank of the Murray, and so found himself in the Port Philip District.

He had advanced but a little way, when the great promise of the district arrested his attention, which further examination more fully confirmed.

Mr. Mitchell—who became Sir Thomas Mitchell in recognition of the discovery—proposed to call the district Australia Felix. It is now known as the independent Colony of Victoria.

My own acquaintance with it began in this way. It was in the days when I took my share in the Overland business of conducting cattle down the banks of the Murray. On this occasion the herd belonged to Mr. Field, who had a large sheep and cattle station about one hundred miles to the north of Sydney. It was not with any idea of traffic he made this venture. His station was much subject to droughts, and, on more than one occasion, his

whole property, consisting as it did of live stock, was seriously imperilled. Consequently, following the new fashion, he determined to shift himself and his belongings somewhere in the direction of the new settlement at Encounter Bay.

I have already said that continued familiarity with the Overland route enabled me to cut off large bends of the river ; in fact, as the whole of the Murray was one long bend, or bow, there was nothing except the necessity of water to keep us in contact with its bank at all. In the present venture we were actually low down in the present Colony of Victoria, heading for the south of Lake Alexandrina, and about half way through our intended journey.

We had halted for the night, and in the morning our stockman was sent to collect in the cattle, which had strayed to some distance. He returned with the intelligence that they were " up to the horns in grass." " Let them stay there," was the reply of our employer. And, sure enough, there the cattle stayed, and there Mr. Field stayed. The situation had taken his fancy—its capabilities were admirably suited for a large sheep and cattle station ; and, in fact, nothing better was likely to offer further on.

In time Mr. Field became an influential and well-

known squatter, and never left the locality which chance—or was it a happy exercise of judgment?—led him to abide by.

I stayed some time at Yew-Yang, which was the name of his new station, and escorted his annual clipping of wool to Melbourne, with which city I thus became familiar.

Now, as I ventured to very briefly sketch the Overlanders for my readers, perhaps I may be permitted to say a word on the Squatters. I admit I may be accounted digressive, my main, and, in fact, only business, being to tell my story of Australian exploration. But, as I said before, the late and truly exhaustive attempt of my commander, Captain Sturt, completely shelved the question for the time being; and next, as you are all aware, the great gold discoveries put all other ideas out of the colonial mind, so that, when exploration again came to the front, almost everything had undergone change. To speak in theatrical language, the curtain being now down, and behind it everything being got ready for the great transformation scene, I may, while we are waiting, relieve the interval by holding a little overture of my own, my theme being "Squatterdom."

Of course, you know, in the early times of

Australian sheep and cattle culture the country was very sparsely populated. Even in the settled districts this was so, and outside them all was an unknown wilderness. Nor did the most lively imagination suggest that it would be ever otherwise. The lands fed sheep, and sometimes cattle, though the risk to both kinds of stock was considerable from drought. And if English gentlemen of capital and intelligence and industry undertook these risks, and the further one of hiring convicts from Botany Bay to do indoor and outdoor work for them, why should they not have the use of these waste lands, which nobody else wanted, or probably ever would want? That is the way Australian settlement was then regarded, and no voice was raised against it.

So permitted, or encouraged—or in whatever other light the policy pursued by the home government toward them may be regarded—these gentlemen helped themselves with a very liberal hand. Many of those “runs,” or “stations,” as these occupied tracts came to be called, were as large as English counties. They said it took five acres to feed a sheep—but why dispute about that when the whole country was waste, and *could* be only a sheepwalk? In fact, there were no disputes. Once a gentleman was in occupation, those who came

after him—gentlemen too—gave him a pretty wide berth, for their own sakes and for his.

So far, there was no complaint—nor could any complaint have arisen hereafter. But these gentlemen made one further advance—they said to the home government, in effect: "We have embarked much capital here—we are maintaining the British occupation of these lands—we are supplying England with the best of wool—but we are living on mere sufferance. You should give us some title to our holdings."

The proposition did startle the home government. Lengthened negotiations ensued, and the matter was kept in abeyance for years. But eventually leases were granted under what were considered sufficiently safe conditions at the time. The rent of these holdings was to be merely nominal, but the occupier was not to sub-let, or to use the lands for agricultural purposes, except for the mere wants of his household. I do not know how these gentlemen came to be called squatters. In their leases they are called "Pastoral Tenants of the Crown."

The position of these squatters among their hired "servants of the Crown"—which really meant convicts—naturally gave them a superior and aristocratic bearing; and it only needed the

possession of these leases to make them what they now became—the territorial magnates of the land. They had completely overrun every settled district, and thus appropriated to themselves every available tract.

Then happened that which no one had dreamed of: the great gold discoveries poured thousands upon thousands of new immigrants into the country every day. For a time these new arrivals busied themselves in seeking for gold; but soon disappointed goldminers bethought themselves of turning back upon their former occupations. Of these the most favourite was farming; and then the terrible fact was discovered that there was no land available—the squatters held it, and meant to keep possession of it.

Then ensued the land-war of Australia—which, however, consisted of words. The people, and especially the leaders of the people, said, “Unlock the lands.” The squatters said little, but intimated that they held under the Crown, and considered their title to be indefeasible. In my frequent trips to Melbourne, where eventually I became a resident, I heard all this—and in fact I heard nothing else—all the colonies were simply convulsed over it. What could I say? I could only honestly sympathise with both sides, and hope

that a solution of the difficulty would be found.

Of late years I had been much in intercourse with these squatters—of course in an humble capacity. For, as my readers may understand, a squatter became in turns an Overlander, and *vice versa*. I knew them to be honourable, accomplished, highbred gentlemen. Their homes were as well ordered and as well conducted as any in England. Of course there were no fashionable doings; living at such great distances apart, there was no such thing as goes by the name of “society.” What I mean is that every squatter’s house was conducted on orderly, decorous, and generally religious principles; and he himself was not merely a well-read man, but kept himself up to the English reading of the day. I was an ignorant, unlettered man myself; but in the bush masters and men are thrown so closely together that I could observe this—at least, it used to be so. Of course I must be understood as speaking of what came within my own acquaintance. More lately, where runs and stations came to be sold in the market, some men who had the means to buy became squatters, though as illiterate as they were coarse. But I describe the days as they were, and as they made the original staple wealth of the country.

Consequently, when I heard squatters called "robbers" and "bloated aristocrats," and other opprobrious terms which were now uttered at every street corner in Melbourne, I did just what my late employers did—I listened and said nothing. It was no crime that they had embarked their fortunes on lands which no one else then wanted. At the same time it was an unfortunate accident which threw impediment in the way of men willing to develop the agricultural resources of the country.

Melbourne had now become a large and wealthy city, taking the lead of Sydney and Adelaide. From time to time it was regretted that efforts were not renewed to know more of a continent whose settlements on the coast had so wonderfully developed. No one had travelled from coast to coast—no white man had gone as far even as the centre of the island-continent. This was not creditable to the people of Melbourne, who, as yet, had done nothing whatever in the cause of Australian exploration. Captain Sturt had failed through no lack of skill and endurance. He had the misfortune to be imprisoned in Rocky Glen, where his party had lost in energy and number. But such accidents could now be avoided, and the wealth of the people of

Melbourne ought to provide resources which would enable an expedition to overcome even greater impediments.

Such was the talk—and there, for a time, it ended. The first practical note of preparation was made when the editor of the Melbourne *Argus* announced that a gentleman, who declined to give his name, had placed £1,000 in his hands toward the equipment of an exploring expedition. That was a beginning, and other wealthy citizens of Melbourne soon raised the fund to £3,200. To this the Victorian legislature added £6,000 more. The question of money was thus set at rest. And then the details were talked over. Water had hitherto been the great, the only want to the progress of Australian exploration. Why not provide the expedition with “ships of the desert”? said some one. And straightway an agent was despatched to India for a supply of camels. Pending their arrival, an exploration committee was formed, to which was entrusted the selection of leaders and men, the preparation of stores, and the acquisition of the best appliances which experience and scientific knowledge could suggest. If the people of Melbourne had been slow, they were now determined to be sure. At least, they said so.

The selection of a leader was a tedious and a

trying business. At length the choice fell on Mr. Robert O'Hara Burke, a Galway gentleman, who had now served some years under the colonial government in the country districts. The appointment gave rise to considerable animadversion, chiefly in the public press—though no explanations for such were given. Mr. Landells, who had gone to India for the camels, was, on his return, appointed second in command. Then the purely scientific objects of the expedition, chiefly meteorological, forming a department in itself, a third officer was added with charge over same. This was Mr. William John Wills, who had now served some time in the Melbourne Magnetic Observatory. We numbered, besides, a doctor, a naturalist, twelve men, and an overseer. As for our stores, I shall only tell you that the sum of £5,000 was expended on them. The good people of Melbourne were determined we should not starve—at least they said so. And I am sure they meant it.

The editor of the *Argus* kept his secret well, and the name of the donor of the original £1,000 did not become public property until long after. I happened to be taken behind the scenes for a special purpose, which I may as well here relate.

I have made allusion to some jarring elements connected with the appointment of leaders, and, in

fact, the organisation of the whole expedition. I received a note intimating that a certain well-known and well-to-do citizen wished to have an interview with me. I put two and two together, and said to myself that is very likely to be the unknown donor. And what more likely? I had taken more practical part in Australian exploration than any other member of the present party; there were a number of "bushmen"—that is, persons accustomed to up-country districts and up-country life—but I was the only real explorer of the lot. Years after, I learned my conjecture was right; but in our interview nothing passed to that effect.

I found Mr. Ambrose in a large and empty iron building, a little way off one of the principal streets. Such structures were much used for stores at the time. This store was now to be let again, and Mr. Ambrose, its owner, was here on the spot to answer intending tenants. Having no chair, he was sitting at the top of the few steps which led up to the door, and he was eating his lunch—which appeared to me to be a piece of dry bread—out of a newspaper which he held in his hand.

"Mr. Boffin—William Boffin, I believe?" he said, seeing his own note in *my* hand.

I was rather put about by the "Mister," so I accepted the alternative.

"Yes, sir, I am William Boffin."

Mr. Ambrose seemed pleased with my plainness. He was plain himself, but quiet and civil, which many Melbourne citizens who had made their fortunes were not, at the time.

"You should know something of this business, William?"

The business he referred to was exploring—I knew that. The people of Melbourne generally had only one idea in their minds at a time—and the public idea now was the new expedition.

I replied to the effect that I had served under very good commanders. Mr. Ambrose looked rather hard at me. Was I "dodging" his question, or merely indulging in a little mock humility? I think he was inclined to put his query in a manner to leave me no loophole, only he thought better of it. Affectation or no affectation, I was but an humble member of the new expedition; and it was not fair to my position nor to his position to lead me to too free opinions of my present superior officers—if I had any opinions at all, except a sense of the duties I had undertaken.

So I interpreted the pause, and a slight shifting of the subject on the part of my interrogator.

"All will be right when the expedition clears out of the settled districts, and gets into its real

work. Topics are scarce in the colony, and the newspapers must fill their columns with something."

Of course I knew he alluded to the letters appearing in the public press. But if Mr. Ambrose had any previous idea of "pumping" me, he had now dismissed it. In very truth I had nothing to tell him, more than he knew himself. The committee was anonymously blamed for its selection of officers, and, more especially, for its arrangement of them in their several grades. That was known to every one. And I myself did think that when we got into the real field of our labours, where there were neither anonymous writers nor newspapers to encourage them, our proper work would go on, having only natural obstacles to encounter, for which we might need all our time and attention.

At length we were on the eve of this "clearing out" which Mr. Ambrose had thus alluded to. Preliminary preparations had been of the very longest, not to say the most tedious. Two years had elapsed since the unknown donor had commenced the required fund by his own liberal contribution. But all unpleasantness was now dismissed in the face of the actual start about to be made. Bright broke the morning of August

20, 1860, and the whole cavalcade forming the new expedition was collected in the Royal Park, Melbourne, where the final leave-taking between party and citizens was to be held, after which the journey was to be commenced in real earnest.

It was certainly a gay and inspiriting sight. The colony had done the thing rightly at last—so the colonists themselves said—and had now come to look at its handiwork. There were not less than ten thousand people in the Royal Park on that morning. The camels chiefly attracted notice—they were absolutely new to the country.

Then the little function of the day commenced. The Mayor of the city, advancing to Mr. Burke, the leader of the expedition, addressed him in these words :—

“Mr. Burke, I am fully aware that the grand assemblage this day, while it has impeded your movements in starting, is, at the same time, a source of much gratification to you. It assures you of the most sincere sympathy of the citizens. I will no longer detain you. But for this crowd, and on behalf of the colony at large, I say—God speed you.”

In reply, Mr. Burke said :—

“Mr. Mayor, on behalf of myself and the expedition, I beg to return you my most sincere

thanks. No expedition has ever started under such favourable circumstances as this. The people, the government, the committee—all have done heartily what they could. It is now our turn; and we shall never count it success till we justify what you have done in showing what we can do.”

The gay concourse, the picturesque cavalcade, the stirring association of future discoveries with those lying around them, so recent, and yet now so wonderfully developed—all these called forth enthusiasm, and doubtless silenced all dissenting elements.

That evening we had our first camp about five miles to the north of Melbourne.

CHAPTER XI.

"SOME ONE HAD BLUNDERED."

WHAT had our party started to accomplish? In other words, what were the main instructions received by our leader from the exploring committee, which had thus equipped us and sent us out into the wilderness?

From what has been already said, I think my readers may be able to follow me in the few preliminary observations I will now proceed to make.

In the second and last of those long and exhaustive excursions which my former commander, Captain Sturt, had made from Park Dépôt, in his efforts to reach the centre of the country, it will be recollected that, about half-way between our dépôt and our farthest advance on that occasion, we came across some good sheets of water, in an

apparently promising district. To this succession of water ponds he had given the name of Cooper's Creek. There was more than one reason then preventing a more full examination of the Cooper's Creek district. We were pressing on, with what strength we could command, to ascertain if the Stony Desert extended so far as to be again struck in our new line of march ; whereas Cooper's Creek lay at right angles to this line of march. Besides, and more chiefly, we came across Cooper's Creek at the fag end of the whole expedition, when officers and men were thoroughly worn out, and the leader himself was actually under promise to make this his very last and final advance. But, on his return to Adelaide, Captain Sturt strongly advised a more full examination of Cooper's Creek District when feasible. His idea was this : if an exploring party could reach Cooper's Creek with undiminished energies and strength—and, the way through Rocky Glen and Park Dépôt being now known, the task so far was a practical and possible one—then a new dépôt might be established there, from which to more safely explore those central regions.

Now the main object of the present expedition was to carry out these suggestions of my old leader. Mr. Burke was to conduct his party to



MEETING OF DARLING AND MURRAY.

Cooper's Creek. Having established his depôt there, he was to examine Central Australia, as circumstances and his own discretion suggested to him. He might further cross the continent to its north coast ; but that, also, was to be discretionary with him. Thus it will be seen that, while the new expedition had its clearly defined objects, the leader was subject to no unnecessary formalities in their attainment.

In my last chapter I left the expedition and myself five miles outside Melbourne, on its way straight through the colony of Victoria to the banks of the Murray, constituting its northern boundary. You see, all the suggestions of my late leader, Captain Sturt, were to be carried out ; and we were now to follow in his actual footsteps, as it were. Thus we were to strike the Murray at the point where it is joined by the Darling. Then we were to proceed up the Darling till we arrived at the Menindie of our former route of 1845 ; after that, the Darling turns toward the east, our own course being toward the north.

For evidence of the rapid progress and development of the colony of Victoria I was of course prepared. I had been now some years a resident in it, and, in my frequent trips between the station of Mr. Field and Melbourne, had opportunities of

seeing for myself. But the advance of settlement on the other side of the Murray, and up the Darling to Menindie itself, I was not quite so prepared to witness. It seemed such a short time to me since we had astonished the Murray blacks by our presence on their river ; and as for Menindie, we had come to know it through the description—a highly exaggerated one, it turned out—of the natives themselves. *Now* there was a sheep station at Menindie—in charge of an overseer of whom I will have something to say presently ; while the whole of the vast region lying between the Darling and the Murray was being rapidly settled under the name of Riverina, the settlers very confidently talking about its establishment as an independent colony ! Thus you see how very closely settlement follows on the footsteps of discovery in Australia.

However, we should now be leaving settlement again behind us—would it ever follow our new footsteps?—in our prescribed progress northward. But we were not doing so. A hitch there was, and our officers were not pulling together. In an expedition of this kind absolute secrecy becomes impossible ; men and officers are thrown together, and, while commands are obeyed, all are otherwise on a nearer footing of equality and confidence

But, even before leaving Melbourne, something had really leaked out. It was known to us that our second officer in command had demanded from the exploration committee a larger remuneration for his services than that apportioned to the leader himself. The camels had fallen to his especial charge, and the committee had become alarmed, the success of the expedition being supposed to depend so much on the help of these animals; whereas, in the event, they proved absolutely worthless, and a drag. However, Mr. Burke had come to the rescue of the committee. Himself indifferent to pecuniary reward, he had replied, in his impetuous and unsuspecting manner, "Let him have it." A more cool and calculating disposition must surely have seen that the arrangement he had thus sanctioned struck at the root of a necessary discipline and subordination.

Even thus soon was that to be now proved. At Menindie Mr. Landells proposed conditions concerning the camels which his leader declared to be impossible, and, on this occasion, was firm. The second officer tendered his resignation, and returned to Melbourne. The doctor followed his example.

The next step was still more unfortunate. The vacancy caused by the retirement of Mr. Landells

was filled up by the appointment of Mr. Wills as second in command. Nothing could be more proper and judicious than that. But the promotion of Mr. Wills made a vacancy in itself, and the leader offered the post of third in command to the overseer—or, rather, I believe, retired overseer—of the sheep station at Menindie, to whom I have previously made allusion. To be sure, Mr. Burke was not without his reasons for so doing. Wright—such was the name of the overseer—professed an acquaintance with the whole district, and said he would lead the party northward by a better track than that previously chosen by Captain Sturt in 1845. This he did. But then certain qualities of education and association are needed in an officer in command of men. Now Wright was a very ignorant man—could not even write a letter—and was regarded by the party as unfit for a responsible post.

I write these details, no doubt petty in themselves, but, as I am to leave conclusions to my readers, I feel bound to state facts, however apparently trifling, as they happened.

I have spoken of our leader as impulsive, and simply and singly engaged in the task he had undertaken. His desire was to go straight to his work, and these delays and interruptions, dating

from a previous time in Melbourne, and now coming to a more unpleasant phase still in this open disruption at Menindie, adding, as was necessarily the case, a further tedious correspondence with the exploration committee at Melbourne to sanction this reorganisation of the expedition—all these, I say, tended to increase a perhaps natural impatience; and, a guide offering to show the way—and a shorter and better way—his services were accepted, and the vacant post conferred on him.

The start from Menindie was made on October 19th—two months, wanting a day, since the expedition had cleared out of Melbourne. No wonder the leader sought to be on his way in earnest, and to put negotiation and correspondence behind him. Yet was the start a hasty one. The expedition was divided, never to meet again. Mr. Burke and Mr. Wills set out for Cooper's Creek, accompanied by six men, fifteen horses, and sixteen camels. Wright was to show the new way for the first hundred miles, and then to return to Menindie for the purpose of bringing on the rest of the men and the bulk of the stores.

The way was new to me, and, I am bound to add, agreeably so. We left our old track of 1845 a little to the left of us, passing through a very promising country, well watered, and with a good

supply of herbage. The creeks appeared to have permanent stores of water. We made each day's journey about twenty miles long, and always encamped beside good water-holes. All this further points a suggestion I have already made, namely, that a district should not be condemned on the evidence of one track through it; better land may lie close at hand; and the seasons, too, are also to be considered. The summer of 1845 had been an exceptionally dry one all over Australia.

Having fulfilled his promises so far, Wright returned to Menindie on November 5th. He carried a letter from his leader, which he was to forward to the exploration committee at Melbourne. Mr. Burke wrote very favourably of the country, hoped the committee would confirm Wright's appointment as third officer, and intimated the arrangement of the rest of the expedition being brought up to Cooper's Creek under his charge. "If," he wrote, "Mr. Wright is allowed to follow out the instructions I have given him, I am confident that the result will be satisfactory."

Before taking up the further progress of this advance party I may as well here briefly tell what came of Mr. Burke's letter and the instructions so clearly expressed in it. The separation at Menindie was only the beginning of other separa-

tions, rendering the task of narration somewhat difficult and trying. Where not present in person, as this division rendered impossible in all or even more than one case, I must only endeavour to be present in spirit, if I am to maintain any continuity of story at all.

Wright made no practical effort to bring on the bulk of the expedition from Menindie. He had his excuses, which he laid before the committee. His leader required a further supply of dried meat—Mr. Burke had mentioned this in his letter—for which he had no money; the stores could not be moved up country without an additional supply of horses. These matters would require something like £200. Finally, the committee ought to sanction his appointment as third officer.

All this Wright now proceeded to communicate to the committee at Melbourne, through a man named Hodgkinson. Hodgkinson certainly did not copy the dilatoriness of his employer. He left Menindie on November 19th, and arrived in Melbourne on the last day of the month—four hundred miles in eleven days. The day of his arrival was Sunday. The committee met early on Monday morning. They had already exhausted the large funds entrusted to them, and were surprised at this new need for money. But Mr.

Burke's wishes were to be carried out at all hazards. The Governor of the colony guaranteed the sum of £400, the appointment of Wright as third officer was confirmed, and despatch in removing the stores from Menindie to Cooper's Creek was urged upon him. That evening Hodgkinson left Melbourne with the committee's reply to this effect, returning to Menindie on January 9, 1861.

Finally, on January 26, 1861, more than three months after the departure of his leader for Cooper's Creek, Wright proceeded leisurely to follow after him with the main expedition. Neither Wright nor the main expedition ever reached Cooper's Creek, nor apparently made any sustained effort to do so. In this necessarily digressive and discursive narrative, the result of the breaking up of the expedition, I will return to Wright and his doings as soon as any attempt at continuity of the main narratives will allow me to do.

With the foregoing explanation I must now proceed with the small party under the command of the two leaders, Mr. Burke and Mr. Wills.

After the return of Wright to Menindie, the line of march, which had been a little east of Captain Sturt's track of 1845, was still further altered, the promise of the country in that direction con-



COOPER'S CREEK.

tinuing. Thus Rocky Glen was left some one hundred miles on our left hand. But, when on its parallel of latitude, a fine creek was crossed, the Balloo, which, in all probability, forms the upper portion of the watercourse supplying Rocky Glen. The regular rate of twenty miles a day was adhered to, water and grass being always found. Thus, in twenty-one days after the start from Menindie, Cooper's Creek was reached, the party showing no signs of fatigue or exhaustion. In consequence of this alteration of route I have referred to, the creek was struck nearly one hundred miles higher up than the point of Captain Sturt's original discovery of it.

First impressions of the creek were not less favourable than those of Captain Sturt. The body of water was evidently a permanent one. Fine timber lined the course of the creek, as had been previously observed in the expedition of 1845, and the supply of grass was good and plentiful.

In this examination of the creek the party had gradually worked its way down in the direction of Captain Sturt's crossing, and, about midway, a depôt was established.

But not only was the report of Captain Sturt fully borne out as regards the creek itself: the

country beyond equally tallied with the description which he had given of it. My readers may call to mind that we had exhausted every effort to find any further safe resting-place to the north. A precisely similar experience now fell to the lot of Mr. Burke's party. From the new dépôt thus established on the creek, five protracted and harassing excursions were made with no better result. Then Mr. Burke announced a new arrangement.

He, Mr. Wills, and two of the men were to make a dash for the north coast, coming out somewhere on the Gulf of Carpentaria. Mr. Burke's main instructions had been to make himself better acquainted with Central Australia. At the same time, while left discretionary with him, the suggestion was certainly placed before him that the actual crossing of the continent was a long-sought desideratum of Australian exploration. A month had now been spent on barren and fruitless effort to effect any further lodgment in these central regions. Had the time fairly come to take up so prominent an alteration as the crossing of the continent? In answer to such question, I can only state the present position of the expedition under his command and care.

He had left the bulk of this expedition and the

stores at Menindie two months previously, with clear instructions to follow after him. He and his small party in advance had reached Cooper's Creek in twenty-one days. Therefore, making the greatest possible allowance for the slower movement of the more encumbered party, he should expect their arrival at the creek by this time. We now know that this party had not left Menindie even at that date—did not leave it for more than a month after. But Mr. Burke could not know this—could not possibly know it. Was he disappointed that Wright had not already joined him—for which there had been ample time? Whatever the motive, the resolve was now made.

The two leaders took with them, besides two men, one horse, six camels, and provisions for four months. There were left at the depôt at Cooper's Creek four men, six camels, and twelve horses.

A German named Brahe was placed in charge of this depôt at Cooper's Creek. He was to await the arrival of Wright with the rest of the party and the stores. That he would arrive, Mr. Burke never entertained the slightest doubt. Whether he himself would return, and when, was more questionable. At all events, Brahe was to remain four months at the depôt. Whenever he left it, the stores were to be câched. Thus, finally, the expe-

dition which had left Melbourne in August, was now divided into three portions. Wright, with the party under him, was still at Menindie. Brahe, in charge of three men, was at the dépôt on Cooper's Creek. On the 16th of December the two leaders with two men, committed themselves to the wilderness, to reach the north coast and return.

We may here dismiss the two parties under Wright and under Brahe from the scene. All interest now centres in the small party under Mr. Burke and Mr. Wills. Here is their dismissal :

On the expiration of the four months, Brahe, with the men under him, abandoned the dépôt, and hastened to regain the old track from Menindie. At that time Wright had got as far only as Balloo, six months after he had passed his promise to Mr. Burke to follow him. Balloo had been reached by Mr. Burke and his advance party in nineteen days from Menindie.

The two leaders and their two men left the dépôt on December 16th. It will be understood that a dépôt had been previously formed higher up on the creek, which was considered insecure, and much infested with rats. The present dépôt was nearer to the former crossing-place of Captain Sturt, and Mr. Burke now led his small party actually down to this point, or very near it, before abandoning the

creek, and throwing himself on the region beyond. In fact, the whole of the country to the north of the two depôts had been examined in the excursions previously referred to, without promise of any practical route to the north. Captain Sturt had made two similar excursions, with a division, at their two extreme points of advance, of about a hundred miles; and Mr. Burke now selected a route intermediate between these two lines of advance. By this he hoped to strike Eyre's Creek, which Captain Sturt had also spoken favourably of, and thence work his way northward.

The selection was fortunate beyond expectation. It is not certain if Eyre's Creek was struck at all. Considerably to the north of its locality a fine body of water was discovered, which may form the upper portion of Eyre's Creek, or be an independent watercourse. It received the name of Burke's Creek. Here the party halted and spent their Christmas Day. Prospects were good, and were improving. Burke's Creek had splendid reaches of water, with every appearance of permanency; the herbage was abundant, and the situation delightful. Here was really an oasis in the desert, and the small party congratulated itself on at length striking on so practical and so promising

a route. Never, in the most sanguine moments of the leaders, had such luck been expected.

Nor did promises fall off. Burke's Creek continued to assist them for some days in their progress north. Splendid sheets of water, five miles long and very deep, were successively passed. It is true on the right hand of the party appeared those high red sand-ridges which Captain Sturt had so frequently described, and which now came down to the very bank of the creek. But the opposite, or left, bank disclosed extensive plains, which, though now in their midsummer garb, gave indications of being better clothed at more favourable seasons. On the whole, considering the period of the year (the very acme of Australian barrenness)—the near approach to the tropic—the tradition of gloom and desolation which hung over these central regions—the existence of lands certainly not worse than those within settled districts was matter for surprise as well as pleasure.

With heightened interest was watched the actual entrance on tropical ground. Burke's Creek, which had been their companion for some days now, began to assume a more eastern direction. With regret it was abandoned, the party taking with them a supply of water for ten days.

A week after, the southern tropic was crossed. Here, wood, water, and pasturage again awaited them. The reach of water was two chains broad, and fifteen feet deep.

In a word, the country continued to improve at every step. Everything looked green and luxuriant, and fresh plants met the view with every advance. Flocks of pigeons rose from the plains and wild ducks from the creeks, and flew off to the eastward. Only in the most favoured spots of the settled districts could equal fertility be found. Beyond doubt, the vegetation here is permanent, and excellent of its kind.

These tropical, well-watered plains were succeeded, after a week's journeying through them, by a series of rises, on which was conferred the name of the Standish Ranges. Among them were interspersed good grassy flats, with plenty of water in the gullies. The creeks, too, assumed more of a clean, sandy, pebbly character, and the water was clear, *running* water, which one hardly expects to find in an Australian watercourse in summer.

From the highest elevation of these ranges, a descent of a couple of miles led down to a creek having a northern course. It soon turned to the south-east, but was joined by another creek which also came from the north. The banks were lined

by fine specimens of the white gum-tree, and there was abundance of rich green pastures everywhere.

From the top of the Standish Ranges had been dimly discerned a fresh succession of rises. These were now found equally well supplied with water, and the herbage was even finer. All the creeks, full as well as empty, were bedded with a fine, loose, and clean sand. In the dry creeks, on removing this sand, a beautifully cool and clear supply of water was found, which had naturally percolated through the sand. The heat of the tropics was now getting excessive, and these cool waters were proportionately appreciated; in fact, water, the scarcity of which had hitherto been the obstacle to all Australian exploration was now plentiful, and even showed signs of becoming redundant. With the decline on the other side of these second series of ranges a low, flat country was entered upon, portions being now found submerged. Thus a direct northern route to the Gulf was not always practicable. There were frequent detours, and occasionally a proposed course had to be abandoned, and another tried.

The heat of the day, too, became intolerable, necessitating another change of proceeding. Hitherto each day's journey had been commenced about six in the morning. Now, the start was

made a little after midnight, and, as there was full moon the main portion of the distance from camp to camp was surmounted before the sun exercised its main strength. On the return journey from the Gulf the same expedient was had recourse to, when moonlight permitted. All halting-places were numbered consecutively, beginning with the initial start from Melbourne. Thus the first depôt on Cooper's Creek was Camp 57. On the return journey from the Gulf the same numbers were used, with the addition of R for return.

But the shores of the Gulf were now found difficult of approach, in contrast to the comparative ease and facility with which the journey to them had been hitherto made. As the ranges were left behind the ground became swampy, especially in the neighbourhood of the creeks. The cattle bogged repeatedly, and much time and labour were expended in extricating them. So serious was this impediment found, that at Camp 119 it was determined to leave the camels in charge of the two men, the two leaders pushing on in an endeavour to reach the Gulf.

The new arrangement was this. The leaders proceeded on foot, leading their one horse with three days' provisions. They could not be very

far off now. Camp 119 was on the banks of a stream which evidently communicated with the sea ; its waters were slightly brackish, and there was a rise and fall in the tide. It received the name of the Cloncurry.

The final stages were accomplished with difficulty and hardship. The horse, even with his light load, could do little to extricate himself from his frequent founderings. The leaders, even when not in the creeks, were up to their knees in water on the plains. There was danger of being engulfed, when a native path conducted them to higher ground. Here they entered a fine forest, with a fresh-water stream. Yams lay on the surface in profusion ; the natives had taken only the best. The leaders were not so particular, but ate many of those that they had rejected, and found them good.

This forest looked out on another marsh, flooded at times by the sea water. Hundreds of wild geese, plover, and pelican were disporting themselves in the various water-courses which intersected it. On the whole, the contrast to the dismal swamps they had been traversing was most pleasing.

Here the horse was tied up, and the two leaders made their way alone to the coast.

Thus was solved the hitherto baffling problem

of Australian exploration. For the first time the island-continent had been crossed from shore to shore. Taking the start from Melbourne and terminating with their present position on the Gulf of Carpentaria, the track was practically a straight one, and nearly coincided with the 141° parallel of east longitude. Among surprises this is certainly not the least one, that the whole of the region thus traversed, over fifteen hundred miles in length, furnishes country available for human habitation.

Of course, my readers must have already understood that the particulars here given of the portion of this journey between Cooper's Creek and the Gulf could not come within my own observation. They are taken from the journals, or field books of Mr. Wills. It is stated that Mr. Burke kept records also, but they are not forthcoming. A similar remark applies to the return journey to Cooper's Creek.

This return journey now pressed upon the attention of the two leaders. Their two men had been left a couple of camps behind with the camels. This camp was regained only to continue the journey.

These camels now consisted of five, one named Golah, having got into a creek, from which he

could not be extricated. On reaching the camp, however, Golah was found to have got himself out. He was very thin, and apparently had fretted much at the loss of the other camels. He had walked up and down the old track until he had worn a pathway, and, though there was splendid pasture within a short distance, there was no appearance of his having gone in search of it. On seeing the other camels he immediately began to feed.

Eventually, however, Golah proved unequal to the return journey, and was finally abandoned at Camp 18 R.

The redundancy of water rather increased, only now it was from overhead and not from under foot. In other words, it rained almost incessantly. All the creeks were overflowing. The summer being now passed the country was beginning to show the effects of the rains; thus everything looked even more promising on the return journey. The flats in the neighbourhood of the creeks containing the richest alluvial soil were clothed with luxuriant vegetation. Immense plains expanded themselves of the finest character for pastoral purposes; and evidence of permanent water was more distinct. Generally speaking, the return camps coincided with those on the outward journey; but the

expedient of short cuts being so pressing, this was not always the case ; so that, practically, there were additional opportunities of judging the country.

However, the near possibility of neither the men's strength, nor the small stock of provisions now left being adequate to the length of journey still remaining to Cooper's Creek, precluded any further examination of the district now traversed. In fact, the return journey had now become a forced march.

Four weeks after, another of the camels showed unmistakable signs of failing, and was killed, the flesh being dried in the sun for food. In the succeeding week their one horse, Billy, shared the same fate.

Ten days after, one of the men, Gray, succumbed. He had not been well for some time, and latterly his conduct had been attributed to "shamming." The party were now feeling the full effects of four months' continuous toil and exposure ; there was hardly strength left to bury Gray. No actual want had been experienced up to the present ; but as only four months' provisions had been taken from Cooper's Creek, full rations had never been issued on the return journey. There was now little left, except the animal food

they had thus procured. More unfortunate still, as they drew nigh to the Dépôt, water became scarce and precarious. Forced marches now resolved themselves into an actual run for life.

Two days after the death of Gray, they found themselves within thirty miles of the Dépôt, and determined to accomplish the remainder of their task in one continuous journey. Everything was abandoned, and the small party neared the Dépôt late that evening.

Mr. Burke was ahead, and thought he distinguished Brahe and the men under him in the distance. "There they are," he shouted to his companions; "I see them."

Alas! he had mistaken for them some bushes in the gathering gloom. At half-past ten on that very morning, the Dépôt had been abandoned.

The disclosure was appalling. The leader himself gave way, and flung himself on the ground, overwhelmed. The other two looked around them, and presently they saw a tree marked, "DIG, 21 April, 1861."

Following the instructions, they discovered a box with provisions, and also a bottle containing a letter.

The letter read thus :—

"DEPÔT, COOPER'S CREEK,
"April 21, 1861.

"The depôt party of the Victorian Exploration Expedition leaves this camp to-day to return to the Darling. I intend to go south-east from Camp 60 to get into our old track near Balloo. Two of my companions and myself are quite well; the third, Patten, has been unable to walk for the last eighteen days, as his leg has been severely hurt when thrown by one of the horses. No one has been up here from the Darling. We have six camels and twelve horses in good working condition.

"WILLIAM BRAHE."

What now was to be done? The most obvious course was to hasten after the retreating party, if that were possible. The leader put it to his two companions; they stated their inability to do so. He then confessed that he himself was unequal to the task. Besides, this retreating party was fresh and well mounted, while the return party from the Gulf had just exhausted every effort to reach the Depôt.

After this decision, the box was opened. Brahe had left them 50 lb. of flour, 60 lb. of sugar, 20 lb. of rice, 60 lb. of oatmeal, and of jerked, or dried,

meat, 25 lb. ; but there was no tea. He had taken away all the clothing too, of which the return party was very much in need. However, to the starving men, the provisions seemed ample. They had reached the *Depôt* absolutely empty-handed ; in that last thirty miles they had flung away everything.

On the next morning, refreshed by food and rest, the small party met to consult over the situation.

My readers must have already detected errors of omission and commission in the whole expedition from its inception. But it was not yet too late to crown a great achievement with a happy end. That morning was to decide the fate of the leaders.

Mr. Wills pronounced in favour of a return by their old track to Menindie. Already the terrible prostration of the last few days was disappearing. If they did not succeed in overtaking the retreating party, at least they would be pursuing a well-known path. The camels, which were now failing, would pluck up in the expectation of rejoining their companions. King, the remaining man, agreed in opinion with him.

Mr. Burke's views were different. He pointed to the words in Brahe's note : " Two of my com-

panions and myself are quite well. . . . We have six camels and twelve horses in good working condition." How could they, with two worn-out camels, overtake a well-equipped party on its retreat? Then he reminded his companions of the rumours which had reached Melbourne before their departure—how Mr. Stuart had achieved further advances from Adelaide in the direction of this very Cooper's Creek with most favourable and unexpected results, of which the settlers were already availing themselves, having now got within 150 miles of the Creek. The shortest route was the best one; and if they could fall in with any of these later settlers, their safety was assured.

Nor was this all. It had also been known, and previously—in fact, so far back as 1856—that Mr. Gregory, in searching for the lost expedition of Dr. Leichhardt, had made the discovery that the Torrens basin was not one, but a number of lakes, separated by firm ground; and had thus actually emerged from the interior at the head of Spencer Gulf. To be sure, he had described the whole journey as difficult and forbidding. But then there was the hope of falling in with this new settlement.

Finally, Mr. Burke declared that Cooper's Creek should be followed down in the direction which it was taking for the Torrens district.

Accordingly, on the second day of the return to Cooper's Creek, a start was made in a westerly direction down that water-course. The camels were practically useless. Each member of the party took a pack of 30 lb. weight. All else was restored to the cache, which was covered up as before, the following letter only being added :—

“ DEPÔT NO. 2, COOPER'S CREEK,

“ CAMP 65.

“ The return party from Carpentaria, consisting of myself, Wills, and King (Gray dead), arrived here last night, and found that the whole depôt party had only started on the same day. We proceed to-morrow slowly down the Creek towards Adelaide by Mount Hopeless, and shall endeavour to follow Gregory's track ; but we are very weak. The two camels are done up, and we shall not be able to travel faster than four or five miles a day. Gray died on the road, from exhaustion and fatigue. We have all suffered much from hunger. The provisions left here will, I think, restore our strength. We have discovered a practical route to Carpentaria, the chief position of which lies in 140° of east longitude. There is some good country between this and the Stony Desert. From thence to the Tropics the land is dry and stony.

Between that and Carpentaria, a considerable portion is rangy, but well watered and richly grassed. We reached the shores of Carpentaria on the 11th of February, 1861. Greatly disappointed at finding the party here gone.

"ROBERT O'HARA BURKE, Leader.

"April 22, 1861."

That day's journey down the creek only extended to five miles. Notwithstanding some hopeful expressions in the above letter, as also throughout the journals of Mr. Wills, evidence is not wanting that the strain of the return journey from the Gulf continued to tell terribly on them, as also that their privations were greater than have been left on record. By nature, Mr. Wills was hopeful and cheerful, and even still, though having yielded in his views to his superior officer, he continues to write brightly. Though able to accomplish so short a journey on that day, he adds that their change of diet was already making a great improvement in their spirits and strength, adding that they had the further advantage of delightful weather, the days being agreeably warm though the nights were chilly, and brought their deficiency in clothing disagreeably home to them.

Next day some friendly natives made their

appearance. They brought them some fish, which proved a welcome variety.

For the three succeeding days they effected progress down the creek, though still slowly. Here they lost one of their two camels, which got bogged in the creek, and could not be extricated. Nor could they conceal from themselves that their prospects were not improving. It will be recollected that, in their start for the Gulf, they had similarly followed down the creek in order to fall in with the crossing place of Captain Sturt in 1845. They now found that they had barely accomplished in four days what they had then effected in one.

Their progress during the six succeeding days was slower, and even more disappointing. The creek was found to branch off into a succession of smaller arms, each of which died out on a bare earthen plain. Finally, on the tenth day, they were absolutely driven back from want of water. They knew that Mr. Gregory's track would lead them to the old sand ridges so vividly described by Sturt and Eyre ; but, though under the impression that the channel was continuous, they could not succeed in finding it.

Thus, they now fell back on their resting-place of the previous day, that is, Camp 9 from the Dépôt. Here they gave their one camel a few

days' rest ; during which the natives again appeared, and again regaled them liberally with fish. On this occasion they added cakes, made from the seeds of a grass, which they called nardoo.

Before leaving Camp 9 the leaders now determined to seek out these natives, chiefly with a view of ascertaining where this nardoo was to be found. They succeeded in finding the natives, and were again liberally supplied with fish and nardoo. They recognised three different kinds of fish. The best, and quite a delicacy, ran from a pound to two pounds in weight, which the natives called cawilchi. The more common kind, with large, coarse scales, they termed peru. Besides which, there was a small fish, about six inches long, and not broader than an eel, called cupé. To these, as before, were added cakes of nardoo. But the leaders failed to convey to their entertainers the chief object of their visit, namely, to ascertain where the plant itself grew.

This visit to the natives consumed three days more, and they returned to King, at Camp 9, with a supply of fish and nardoo for him. Their last camel was now unable to travel, and was shot, the flesh being jerked. The meat so prepared was cached. Then the following week was spent in unavailing search for the nardoo plant in the neigh-

bourhood of their resting-place. In the meantime the natives had abandoned their camping-ground, moving higher up the creek.

A fresh council was held, and it was again determined to make trial of the westerly journey. Everything was now cached, except three small packs. Even here the men miscalculated their strength, for the packs had to be lightened a few hours after this new start. The object now was, avoiding their former track, which had brought them on to waterless, barren plains, to adopt a more southerly direction, in the hope of picking up some fresh creek leading west.

In the course of the second day King caught sight of the long-sought nardoo plants, and it was soon found that the plain was covered with them. At first the plant appeared to be clover. But a nearer inspection disclosed the seeds, which were very plentiful. The discovery was a revolution in the feelings and intentions of the small party. In such profusion it seemed impossible they could starve, even if they were destined to remain on the creek and wait for assistance, which, at some time, must come.

Such feelings were only too natural. In the extremity under which the small party now was, any promise was grasped. But, indeed, the im-

practicability of this westerly journey was becoming apparent, if it had ever been feasible. Nothing more was heard of it.

The whole of the succeeding ten days was spent in collecting nardoo seeds, pounding them, and baking into cakes. As a food it was not unpalatable, and it was found and used without stint. Yet no returning strength was the result, but the opposite.

At the request of his leader, Mr. Wills now undertook a journey up the creek to the depôt. It will be recollected that, on their return from the Gulf, the small party had there deposited a paper, stating their intention to make trial of this western route. This route being now abandoned, and a sojourn on the lower portion of the creek being determined on instead, it was deemed desirable to add such further intimation to the paper. With this intention Mr. Wills left his two companions on May 17th.

Half-way up the creek the natives were again fallen in with, picking nardoo seeds. They treated Mr. Wills with great kindness and hospitality, sharing their cakes and fish. The nardoo grew here in even greater profusion ; the ground in some cases being black with the seeds. The natives supplied him with food, rest, and fire for the

night, and sent him on his journey in the morning.

He reached the dépôt on May 30th. With the exception of blacks, he found no traces of any one having been there since the paper had been deposited. He now placed the following note in the cache :—

“ DEPÔT CAMP, *May* 30th.

“ We have been unable to leave the creek. Both camels are dead, and our provisions are exhausted. Mr. Burke and King are down the lower part of the creek. I am about to return to them, when we shall probably come up this way. We are trying to live the best way we can, like the blacks, but find it hard work. Our clothes are going to pieces fast. Send provisions and clothes as soon as possible. The dépôt party having left, contrary to instructions, has put us in this fix. I have deposited some of my journals here for fear of accident.

“ W. J. WILLS.”

This done, Mr. Wills proceeded to retrace his steps down the creek to regain his companions. The task proved a trying one to him. Extreme lassitude had now set in, and only a few miles could be accomplished each day. The natives had again moved, and the loss of their hospitality

was felt. A few fish-bones was all that could be found in their former quarters, which were chewed and swallowed.

Further down the creek he was more lucky. Some smoke appeared in the distance, and presently a "cooey" was heard. It proceeded from Pitchery, a chief of the natives, who stood on the opposite bank of the creek, and thus attracted his attention, directing him round the lower end of the water-hole, and assuring him of abundance of fish and cakes.

With difficulty Mr. Wills ascended the opposite bank, when the chief led him to their camping-ground, where he found a fire, on which a large pile of fish was just being cooked in best native fashion. The quantity led to the belief that the supply was intended for the consumption of the half-dozen natives gathered around. However, it turned out that these already had had their breakfast. The guest was expected to dispose of the whole lot—a task which he confesses he accomplished, keeping two or three blacks pretty steadily at work extracting the bones for him. The fish being disposed of, next followed a supply of nardoo cake and water. The previously famished guest began now to hope there was an end. But Pitchery, allowing a short time for recovery, now

advanced with a large bowl of the raw nardoo flour mixed to a thin paste. This was esteemed an extreme native delicacy, and Mr. Wills appears to have accepted it in reality as such.

During his absence some natives had visited his companions ; but, though they brought presents of fish and nardoo, the result had not been of the same friendly character. Mr. Wills appears to have understood them better. In fact, his idea now was that if they could establish close relations with the blacks they might prolong life through their aid until, as he expresses it, "something would turn up." With that view he again sought them, and, though kindly treated, was not asked to prolong his visit as on the former occasion—and presently the natives moved out of reach.

Their days were now spent in the collection and pounding of the seeds of the nardoo, which had become their sole sustenance. For this purpose they moved up to the chief "nardoo field," near some good water-holes, which they called Nardoo Creek. Mr. Wills and King collected while their leader pounded. Soon, however, Mr. Wills became unequal to this task, and even the preparation of the food was too much for Mr. Burke. Their daily allowance had been from four to five pounds' weight, and its palatable and appetising

character still remained ; but it possessed no nourishing or strengthening qualities for them. "I cannot understand this nardoo at all," writes Mr. Wills—"it certainly will not agree with me in any form ; it appears to be quite indigestible, and cannot possibly be sufficiently nutritious to sustain life by itself." And again he writes, "Starvation on nardoo is by no means very unpleasant, but for the weakness one feels, and the utter inability to move oneself ; for, as far as appetite is concerned, it gives the greatest satisfaction."

At this time, June 29th, the leaders had become unable to assist themselves, and King endeavoured to collect and pound the nardoo as best he could.

While these sad scenes are being enacted at Cooper's Creek, I must again ask for the indulgence of my readers while I take a glance at certain further omissions and commissions of those whose connection with the drama itself cannot be severed.

My readers have been already informed that the party under Brahe abandoned the depôt on the creek on the morning of the 21st of April, just ten and a half hours before the return party from the Gulf arrived there. Up to that time nothing had been heard of the party under Wright, which had

left Menindie on the 26th of January, with the bulk of the stores, after much culpable delay there.

After leaving the dépôt Brahe had crossed over to Balloo Creek, thus getting on the old track from Menindie. This took him two days, and then, he says, he met Wright and his party coming up, with inexplicable slowness, from Menindie. Wright and Brahe both say that, leaving their parties at Balloo, they crossed over to the dépôt at Cooper's Creek in the first week in May ; and, finding the surface of the cache apparently undisturbed, finally abandoned it without further search.

The parties under Wright and Brahe now continued their retreat to the Murray. After that Wright betook himself to Adelaide. Brahe arrived in Melbourne and reported himself to the Exploration Committee there.

That was in June, nearly twelve months since the expedition had started. The committee knew that Mr. Burke had left Menindie in the previous December ; they had even sent a trooper in pursuit of him with certain intelligence from Adelaide concerning recent discoveries of Mr. Stuart. But the trooper failed to come up with him, and returned. Since then absolutely nothing had been heard of the expedition.

Not that the people of Melbourne had quite

rested on their oars. In ten months something ought to have been heard of the expedition—so they reasoned. And before the arrival of Brahe the reasoning had taken this practical shape.

A search expedition was to be sent out. The colonial Government had a leader in its employment in whom every trust could be reposed—but he was now at some distance. Mr. Alfred Howitt had gained considerable experience in the country districts. His Government had sent him to report on the capabilities of the Omeo district; he was now there, amid those grand and picturesque scenes where the Murrumbidgee takes its rise, and where, it may be said, Australian exploration took its first step into the Interior. Mr. Howitt had been just summoned from Omeo to Melbourne when the news brought by Brahe burst like a thundercloud over the city.

Then, for the first time, was it known that the expedition, which had been supplied with every modern resource, had been broken up into useless detachments along the way, and that the actual work had fallen on four men, who were abandoned to their fate in the wilderness.

Melbourne flashed the shocking intelligence to her sister cities of Sydney, Adelaide, and Brisbane. Nothing of its effect was lost. In every

one of those settlements a search expedition was rapidly organised. Queensland, the youngest of the group, was to send a naval expedition round to the Gulf of Carpentaria. The other colonies were to send land expeditions in different directions. That under Mr. Howitt was to hasten straight up the old track from Menindie to Cooper's Creek.

In the midst of this excitement and preparation came another thunder-clap. A police trooper, stationed in the Torrens district, forwarded to his commander at Adelaide a communication which was at once sent on to Melbourne. It was to this effect: A native, from the district beyond Mount Hopeless, had come into the station, and had exhibited the hair of two white men. He said there were white men living on a raft in a lake far to the north—that they supported themselves on fish which they caught with nets made of grass. Questioned as to horses and firearms, the native appeared to deny they had any, but attempted description of some animals which were judged to be camels.

Naturally it was inferred that the tale could only apply to Burke and Wills and their two men, and the urgency of relief became the more apparent. In every way it was considered that the clearing up

of this particular mystery lay most within the scope of the search party about to start from Adelaide, and it was so arranged.

In the meantime Mr. Howitt had arrived in Melbourne, and lost no time in making a fresh start on the track allotted to him. On the 4th of July he had again left Melbourne, and reached Cooper's Creek early in September.

The two leaders had died of exhaustion and want of nutrition in the previous month. Left alone, King had made efforts to attach himself to the native tribe, though, at first, without success. They gave him fish and nardoo, but seemed unwilling that he should remain with them. However, he persevered, following their movements, and at length obtained their consent. They constructed a resting-place for him, and supplied him with food. He, on his part, endeavoured to repay the hospitality, shooting birds for them. When Mr. Howitt visited the creek, his efforts had been crowned with success, and he had actually become an object of care and solicitude to them.

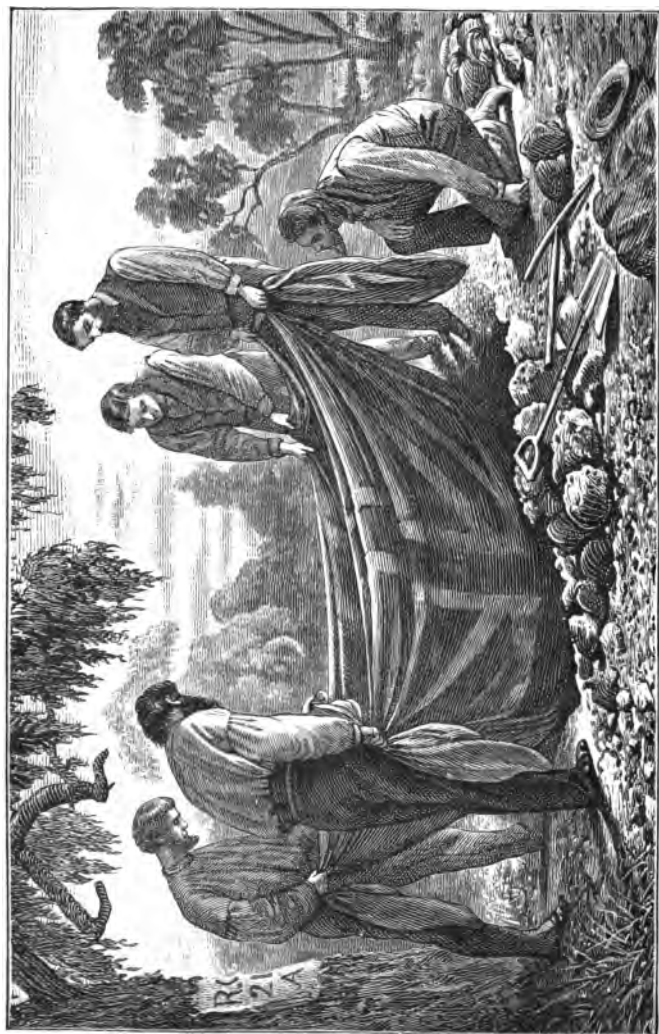
The natives had been on the look out for the advent of this white party. In fact, King had told them that they would certainly come, and would reward the natives for their kindness to him. Presently Mr. Howitt was brought to King, whom he

found sitting in a hut which the blacks had constructed for him. He presented a melancholy appearance—wasted to a shadow, and hardly to be distinguished as a civilised being but by the remnants of clothes still upon him. “He seemed exceedingly weak,” proceeds Mr. Howitt, “and I found it occasionally difficult to follow what he said. The natives were all gathered round, seated on the ground, looking with a most gratified and delighted expression.”

The remains of the two leaders were decently interred. There had been no desecration by the natives ; so the trooper's tale was not applicable in their case.

Nevertheless, it may interest my readers if I briefly describe for them the progress made by the search party from Adelaide, under Mr. M'Kinlay, whose special task it was to clear up this question.

About the time Mr. Howitt was on Cooper's Creek, and had made himself acquainted with the above sad event, Mr. M'Kinlay, still in ignorance of them, had reached Blanche Water, some miles to the north-west of Mount Hopeless. Thence he proceeded on, in a more northerly course, through native tribes, on many of whom he recognised articles of European manufacture. Early in October he was at Lake Pando, one of a system of numerous



INTERMENT OF LEADERS.

freshwater lakes, or lagoons, with which this whole district appears to be studded. Passing still more northward, through this lake system, he arrived on the 24th of October at a beautiful stretch of water, a mile and a half across, well timbered, with abundance of grass and "clover"—probably the native nardoo, which King had first mistaken for clover. Here he was told he would be shown European graves. Skirting along this body of water for some miles, the natives at length pointed out to him a grave. There were some rude huts, or mia-mias, close by, from one of which his men produced a tin vessel, conjectured to have held oil. It was now dark, and, the party being some distance from their night's encampment, it was determined to put off further search till the morning.

With the morning, Mr. M'Kinlay was again on the ground. He was now shown a second grave, "evidently dug with a spade or shovel." In the first was found the body of a European, enveloped in a flannel shirt with short sleeves. The second grave was empty, save for a small quantity of human hair. There were marks of horses and camels hard by, as if tied up for some time; there were also scraps of paper, portions of a nautical almanac, and an exploded gun cartridge. The natives pointed out an encampment, where, they said, the

whites had been attacked and killed ; but Mr. M'Kinlay could find no trace of a struggle having taken place, either on the ground or on the trees around, which might be expected to be marked with shots. Further search disclosed a quantity of hair used in stuffing saddles, some more utensils, and the natives said the iron work of the saddles was still with the tribe. One native was found with the mainspring of a gun.

Mr. M'Kinlay knew nothing of the results of the search party which had started from Melbourne about the same time as his own under Mr. Howitt. Naturally he inferred that he had found the last traces of the party they were both in search of. His main task was therefore at an end, and he shaped his future course in accordance with the instructions he had received from his government.

This native story and its results have given rise to much conjecture. Could these be the remains of the lost Leichhardt party? Certainly it was the purport of the leader of that expedition to traverse this district in his great journey from east to west. But that was now more than a dozen years ago, and Mr. M'Kinlay's description indicates much more recent traces. More credit is given to the assumption that the *one* body found was that of Gray, who died on the fourth day (17th of April)

before Burke and Wills reached Cooper's Creek on their return from Carpentaria. To adopt this, a great deal of the native story must be cut away. The raft, the continued residence of Europeans on or around the lake—the Massacre—the two different kinds of human hair: all these must be set aside as inventions. Mr. M'Kinlay states that the second grave was empty, save for some hair and a few small bones. It must therefore be supposed that the natives removed the body of Gray from the grave his companions placed it in, and put it in that where it was found. All these things are possible—and, lastly, there is to be reconciled the locality. Did the scene of Mr. M'Kinlay's supposed massacre coincide with that of Gray's death and burial?

Unfortunately, Mr. Wills has left no observations in his journal during those last days of the return to Cooper's Creek, which was clearly a forced march, under great privation and distress. On the other hand, Mr. McKinlay, though an experienced bushman, appears rarely to have taken observations at all, or at least to record them in his journal. However, on this particular occasion, he does record an observation, namely, Lat. 27° Long. $139^{\circ} 15'$.

The longitude presents no difficulty. Mr. Burke has left on record that the chief position of the

route to Carpentaria "lies in the 140° of east longitude"; and Mr. Wills' entries abundantly prove that the return journey closely followed the track of the one out, the camps often being the same.

Then as to latitude, Cooper's Creek (at starting-point) would be about 26° . This would place M'Kinlay's Lake Massacre about seventy miles further north. How would this be as regards Gray's death? King states that they remained a day to bury him, being so weak as with difficulty to accomplish that task. In reality, then, the grave was three days' journey from Cooper's Creek. We know that on the last day thirty miles were got over; but this was really a race for life or death, and was not accomplished till half-past ten at night. If we allow twenty miles apiece for each of the other two days, we make up the necessary seventy miles. But was the district anything like that described by M'Kinlay? Wills' last entries of the return contain no descriptions at all. But, on the journey out, in the first week, we meet much that is applicable to it. For instance, under date December 20 (four days out)—"We came in sight of a large lagoon bearing north by west, and, at three miles more, we camped on what would seem the same creek as last night, near where it enters the lagoon. The latter is of great extent, and contains a large

quantity of water, which swarms with wild fowl of every description. It is very shallow, but is surrounded by the most pleasing woodland scenery." Much here seems to tally, even to the blacks, whose presence Wells records to the number of forty or fifty, who gave them fish. "It is a remarkable fact that these were the first blacks who have offered us any fish since we reached Cooper's Creek."

These blacks have been the subject of much discussion. Mr. Wills here expressly records their friendliness. Mr. M'Kinlay, on the contrary, conceived their attitude so threatening that he was obliged to fire on them. It is said that he misunderstood them, which an experienced bushman is not likely to do, though certainly, at the time, he believed them to be the murderers of Messrs. Burke and Wills and their companions. These various contradictions are not without their difficulties. Still, on the whole, we incline to believe that Mr. M'Kinlay, at the time, was on the track of Burke and Wills, and had found the grave of their companion, Gray.

The further advance of the M'Kinley party is interesting towards a knowledge of the interior, and may be here glanced at. Before proceeding north, he starts aside to have a look at Sturt's Stony Desert. Here all is dryness, a contrast

to the lake system, which forms so conspicuous a feature of his main course. The very lagoons are dried up, and the red sand ridges and stone-clad hills continue to watch over the awful stillness of the desert itself, without change or variation. Beyond the Stony Desert, too, lay the Mud Plains, with nothing to alter their bareness and difficulty of transit. On the 13th of January he was certainly at another of Messrs. Burke and Wills' "return" camps, when, on the 10th of April, the exigencies of their situation had obliged them to sacrifice their one horse, Billy. And now he advances beyond the dryness, and thenceforth the party had to contend with the rains and floods which had impeded Messrs. Burke and Wills. On the 19th of May the party had again accomplished the feat of crossing the continent, and were within sight of the sea, a year and two months after Messrs. Burke and Wills had led the way. Actual access to the seashore was impeded by the swamps and lagoons which are evidently a feature of this coast. The two descriptions—those of Wills and M'Kinlay, independently written—so nearly tally as to render it clear that both parties struck on the same district of Carpentaria.

In August the party arrived in the settled districts of Queensland, after much endurance and privation, though without loss of life.



MONUMENT ERECTED TO BURKE AND WILLS, MELBOURNE.

CHAPTER XII.

RIGHT THROUGH THE CENTRE.

IN the preceding chapter it was incumbent upon me to make reference, more than once, to certain exploratory operations in the Adelaide district by Mr. Stuart. That was the Mr. Stuart whom my readers may call to mind as third officer in Captain Sturt's expedition of 1845. My story now takes up the crowning accomplishments of that gentleman. The late Victorian expedition from Melbourne, spite of its sad termination, had effected one feat of Australian exploration. Its leaders had been the first to cross the country from shore to shore. But the original problem involved more. The nature of those central regions remained unknown, save for the forced march through them from Cooper's Creek to the head of the Gulf of Carpentaria. Nor did this

track touch on the actual centre at all. The track itself closely coincided with the 140th parallel of latitude; whereas the centre of the island-continent is on the 133rd parallel, upwards of five hundred miles distant.

Besides, it has been my endeavour to explain that Australian settlers always regarded a knowledge of their country as extending beyond merely scientific questions. Whether, and how, settlement itself could be pushed forward into the Interior was the practical consideration which pressed upon them. It may be recollected that this was peculiarly the case as regards the Adelaide district. And thus it came about, in the fitness of things, that Mr. Stuart began his great and successful task from that district, as well as from an entirely practical point of view.

These beginnings were at first small, and little was heard of them beyond those whom they directly concerned. The settlers to the north of Adelaide wanted more pasture lands. The result of the journey of Mr. Eyre along the south coast seemed to preclude all hope of finding available country in that direction. Thus the once favourite idea of a junction with Western Australia had been now dismissed. Then came the retreat of Captain Sturt from Cooper's Creek, and extension

in this opposite, or more easterly, direction was adjudged equally impracticable. There remained the country directly to the north of Adelaide, which, except for the ineffectual efforts of Mr. Eyre, when the exact nature of the Torrens basin was unsuspected, still remained untried.

Thus it came to pass that some wealthy flock-owners of this district, to whom an extension of territory was now a matter of serious consideration, had employed the services of an officer who had learned his business under so successful a commander as Captain Sturt, to push investigations in this direction. At all times it had been the custom for settlers to look out for new lands, and to keep their discovery as closely to themselves as circumstances would allow.

These early discoveries of Mr. Stuart, made in 1859 and 1860, about the time the good people of Melbourne were commencing their great preparations for their larger scheme, were remarkable and unexpected ; though, for the reason I have assigned, not publicly known until some time after. Besides this, they served to bring out the extraordinary endurance, the unwearied persistence and foresight which were previously only partially recognised in the companion of Captain Sturt during his expedition to the Interior.

On this occasion Mr. Stuart opened up much fine pastoral country, which was immediately occupied ; though he also passed through large barren tracts, destitute of water, which, but for the rare qualities of the leader, must have cut off retreat. In the first of these attempts, assisted by one man, and subsisting for a month on one meal a day, he succeeded in pushing through tracts of dense scrub and sand, the last hundred miles being accomplished, without food or water, in three days.

The second essay was much more encouraging. Escaping entirely to the north of the Torrens basin, he came unexpectedly into regions abounding in springs of fresh water, and capable of affording immediate relief to the pent-up flocks of the Adelaide district.

In 1860 the sum and substance of these excursions were that Mr. Stuart had made perfectly good his advance, some two hundred miles to the north of Adelaide, demonstrating that the hopeless character of the Lake Torrens district was not continuous, and was succeeded by some of the very best land which exploration had yet made available ; in fact, it was already in course of settlement.

Such results could be no longer left to private

enterprise. The colonial government now came forward, presenting Mr. Stuart with a large grant of those lands he had thus made practically accessible. Nor was the matter to be allowed to rest here. The whole of the Australian settlements had long desired to be placed in telegraphic communication with the Old World. The way lay through India. But the Indian Ocean could be approached only from the north of Australia. That had been one of the subjects mentioned in the preparations now making for the Victorian expedition from Melbourne. But the Adelaide people had some particular views of their own. Amid much generous sympathy there was an equally generous rivalry. Now the colonial government at Adelaide had made application to the home government for the continuous belt of land extending thence to the Indian Ocean, and lying between the parallels of 129° and 138° , to which the home government had acceded. Who so capable to examine this vast accession of territory as Mr. Stuart? And, if possible, might not the colony have the land portion of the telegraphic communication in its own hands?

Mr. Stuart had returned from his last excursion northwards in January. In the following March, armed with these instructions, he was again in the

saddle, accompanied by two men and thirteen horses. His former advance was easily made good, and the country beyond was found even more promising. Towards the end of the month he records, "The country travelled over to-day is the best I have ever seen"; and again, "Struck another large gum creek, coming to the south of west, and running to the north-east. It is a fine creek; its courses of water spread over a grassy plain a mile wide. The water-holes are long and deep, with immense plants growing on its banks, indicating permanent water. The wild oats on its banks are four feet high. The country in the ranges is as fine a pastoral country as a man could wish to possess, having grass to the tops of the hills, and an abundance of water through the ranges."

But the entry in his journal under date of April 22, 1860, is that which carries most interest. "I find from my observations of the sun that I am now encamped in the CENTRE of AUSTRALIA. About two and a half miles to the N.N.E. is a high mound. I wish it had been in the centre. I shall go to it to-morrow and build a cone of stones, plant the British flag, and name it Central Mount Stuart. Splendid grass all round."

Thus, unexpectedly, the heart of the country was neither the arid nor inaccessible tracts which past explorations had appeared to indicate.

On the following morning Mr. Stuart put in force his intention just recorded. Taking one of the men with him, he commenced the ascent of the mount. It proved much higher than had been supposed, and the climbing was difficult. After considerable labour and many slips and knocks the top was at length reached. The view to the north was over a large plain of gum-trees, mulga scrub, and spinifex, with water-courses running through it. Before the descent a pole was placed in the middle of a cone of stones, to which the British flag was nailed. Further, was placed a small bottle containing a slip of paper, stating by whom the cone was raised, with the signatures of the party. Then were given three hearty cheers, and the camping-ground was returned to.

A native orange-tree was found in abundance here, as also a new rose of a beautiful description, with a sweet, strong perfume, having thorns on its branches, and a seed vessel resembling a gherkin.

Four days were spent at the Centre; and then, water being found to fail toward the north, an excursion was made toward the west. This course

was persevered in for eight days under great difficulties with similar scarcity of water. At length, when Mr. Stuart had serious doubt whether his persistence had not carried him too far, a retreat was made, and the Centre regained, though in a very exhausted condition.

After a further week's delay at the Centre, rendered necessary by Mr. Stuart's extreme sufferings, consequent on the hardships of the last excursion toward the west, a north-east course was essayed. This was soon altered to a still more northerly course, and at one hundred and fifty miles ahead of the Centre the party was lucky enough to fall in with a considerable creek. About one hundred miles more north a further resting-place was found.

From this temporary place of safety a still more persistent series of excursions was made to the west, north, and east, to see if by any possibility the dense forest and scrub of the country could be broken through, and a way forced either to the head of the Gulf or the north-west coast.

Finally, when in latitude $18^{\circ}47'$, the party was attacked by natives, who set fire to the scrub and endeavoured to cut them off from the horses. A retreat thus became inevitable. Provisions were almost exhausted; the leader and his men quite

worn out by hardships and illness ; and there was much risk of the water behind them drying up.

At this time Mr. Stuart was only two hundred miles from the head of the Gulf, and had nearly attained to the same northern latitude. The party made good their retreat to Adelaide in October, 1860.

It was on that occasion a trooper was despatched in pursuit of Mr. Burke, who, it will be recollected, left Menindie in the same month for Cooper's Creek. The exploration committee at Melbourne deemed it expedient that he should know the result of a somewhat similar undertaking in the neighbouring colony. But the trooper failed to come up with him, and Mr. Burke never heard the intelligence.

I append this remark because surprise has been expressed that Mr. Burke made his start from Cooper's Creek to the Gulf before waiting for the bulk of his expedition to arrive, or, at least, allowing for possible, though not culpable, delay on the way. No doubt he had the promise of Wright to use despatch, and he did wait a month on the creek. It is not to be denied that the intelligence of Mr. Stuart's late operations, if he received them, would have hastened his movements, and the message sent after him contained

a recommendation to that effect ; but then it is equally certain that the news did not reach him. That Mr. Stuart was persistently pushing forward to the north of the Adelaide district in the interests of the flock-owners was known to him before he left Melbourne. But these later exploits were not known even in Adelaide.

On the other hand, Mr. Stuart himself had something to learn. The great Victorian expedition had left Melbourne in the previous August, but, in consequence of misunderstandings and changes resulting therefrom, the two leaders had not finally left the settled districts until this very month of October. Mr. Stuart had reached the Centre; he had approached within a comparatively short distance of the north coast. And now the prize, which was almost in his grasp, was to fall to the lot of others. No doubt the government of South Australia saw it in this light, for the sum of £2,500 was immediately voted for a fresh attempt, and Mr. Stuart stated his readiness to start again in the succeeding month, November.

This new expedition consisted of twelve men, forty-nine horses, and provisions for thirty weeks. Most of the necessary preparations were made at an advanced portion of the settled districts, which now, owing to these recent discoveries of Mr.

Stuart, had already crept far into the Interior. So that it was not until the opening of the new year that the leader of the party had again left civilisation behind him.

This was the fifth time now within a period of two years in which Mr. Stuart had so gallantly dashed against the formidable barriers which opposed him, and again he was to be repulsed. His previous advance was made good on April 25th. A still further advance of one hundred miles north disclosed a succession of wide and open plains, well covered with grass, on a rich and deep alluvial soil. "I certainly never did see a more splendid country for grass; in many places for miles it is above the horses' knees." Notwithstanding this fertility, however, water was not found, thus entailing long and harassing excursions in various directions to find a safe resting-place for the main party.

At length, after many and prolonged searches of this nature, the wished-for water was at last traced to their west side. To this was given the name of Newcastle Water; the plains he called Sturt Plains, "after the venerable father of Australian exploration, and my respected commander of the expedition of 1845."

These excursions delayed the party up to June.

Nor could further advance be found. North, east, and west dense forests and matted scrub interposed their impassable barriers. The horses refused to face these formidable impediments, or, in a rush through them, tore the clothes and lacerated the flesh of the men. The provisions were now failing ; in fact, the party was already on half rations. Thus, while retreat was still possible, it was reluctantly had recourse to. Mr. Stuart reached Adelaide in the latter end of September ; and close following came the last sad intelligence of the deaths of the leaders of the Victorian expedition, forwarded by Mr. Howitt.

Nothing daunted by his succession of defeats, Mr. Stuart was ready for a fresh start in the following October, and, the government approving, was again across the borders of advancing settlements with the new year, 1862.

The party renewed its late acquaintance with Newcastle Water and Sturt Plains in April, and again found itself face to face with the problem to discover a way through the dense scrub and forest which had previously barred advance. Securing a safe depôt as far north as possible, it was arranged to try the country at various points in the hope of a practical opening being at length discovered. Howitt's Ponds—so called from the leader of the

late search party—about fifty miles ahead of Newcastle Water, was the extreme point to which the main party could be safely moved. From this a series of attempts was made all round the compass from the right hand to the left. The future course of the expedition depended on the direction which the opening, if discovered, would take.

It will be recollected that the problem of Australian exploration now remaining to Mr. Stuart was to arrive on the north coast at a point as nearly as possible suitable to the establishment of telegraphic communication with the old world by means of the Indian Ocean. In the position to which he had now attained, any one of the following courses, if possible, would meet the case.

Thus, if a course to the east could be found, the party would come out on the Gulf of Carpentaria, where, among others, it had been thought possible to establish a telegraphic station, though the great length of the main cable through the Gulf itself was a drawback. Notwithstanding this disadvantage, Mr. Stuart now made repeated efforts to reach the head of the Gulf, at length abandoning the effort through sheer impossibility of accomplishment.

Turning to the other, or left-hand, course, success, if possible, was more attractive. Sir George Grey,

in conjunction with the *Beagle*, as I have already informed my readers, had discovered some fine rivers at the top of this west coast, and had even traced them for several miles inland through a rich and promising country. Now, if Mr. Stuart could strike the source of any one of these streams he would thus obtain a water-way to the coast itself. With this object in view, preparations were made at their temporary depôt for a persistent and sustained excursion to the west.

Additional water-bags were constructed to carry them through the dry tracts which intervened. Again, the forest, gloomy, dense, silent, appeared to engulf them. As they advanced its density grew upon them. Pushing, tearing, winding into it, with difficulty could a mile an hour be accomplished. The horses fell dead ; the water-bags, continually torn by the prickly underwood, could not be staunched. Finally, retreat to the depôt became inevitable. At this extreme point, when advance had to be abandoned, the party was barely one hundred miles distant from the Victoria river, which would have provided a safe passage to the coast. At one time Mr. Stuart had thoughts of precipitating himself on the river from this his extreme advance. "With a small party," he writes, "I might make the Victoria from here." But, then, it

was almost certain that the horses would perish on the way. Such was the extremely arid character of these forest tracts, that, though it was not now summer, every blade of grass was parched and dried up, possessing little if any nutritive substance in it. Then the horses had already lost the strength and endurance necessary to undergo a further continuance of the privations they had already been subjected to. The position of a small party without horses, and wholly cut off from supplies from the *depôt*, would be precarious in the extreme; and eventually Mr. Stuart declined to play with the lives of the men entrusted to his charge. In fact, the *depôt* itself was now regained with great difficulty.

The east and the west had now been tried, it may be said exhaustively, for an opening to the coast. There remained the north, which had been essayed in the first instance, but which Mr. Stuart soon resumed his attempts upon again from the *depôt*. Toward the end of May a further advance was discovered, and the *depôt* shifted accordingly. In fact, promises were not wanting that the cordon of dense forest and scrub, which had so frequently repulsed the party, was now giving way, to be succeeded by a better character of country. The new *depôt* was in a well-grassed

region, and excursions further north showed that the fortunate change was a permanent one.

This afforded a much-needed alleviation in the condition of the whole party, on whom the previous toil and hardship was now seriously telling. More especially was such the case with their leader, on whom lay the task of finding a way for the advance of his men. Now, so favourable was the country, the whole party was able to effect steady progress together.

By the middle of June a considerable creek or river was picked up, which helped to conduct the party northward as far as the 15th parallel of latitude. Thus, this fortunate discovery of a direct northern advance already placed the party high above what could have been obtained in an easterly or westerly direction, had either been feasible ; as, also, high above the extreme points of Sir George Grey on the west coast and Messrs. Burke and Wills on the Gulf of Carpentaria. Plainly, therefore, the goal and destination of these long-continued and persistent attempts were shaping themselves for the Adelaide river of the north-west coast, where alone, it had frequently been asserted, could an ocean cable link Australia with the old world, and from which, probably, the mind of the leader had never been entirely absent when battling

with the scrub and the forest, though, as he so frequently expresses it, he had "to go where he could."

The way to the River Adelaide was made still further easy for the party. In fact, it might appear that nature, beginning to understand the human fortitude and endurance which had entered into contest with her, now, from this point, relented of her severity. The creek, or river, which they had just fallen across in the way led on to a fine watercourse, possessing many other tributaries in its progress, as also broad and deep reaches of water some miles in length. Here the country was really magnificent.

On July 10th the leader conjectured that he must be actually on the sources of the river Adelaide. He found himself among a group of flat-topped gracefully timbered hills. Before and below lay a deep creek running in the direction of the line of march. Beyond, and in the distance, stretched a long and picturesque gorge, marking the course of the stream as it wound through these table-lands. Such was, indeed, the valley of the Adelaide, as it now rewarded the sight of the party thus emerging from its long-continued and long-sustained toils and privations.

A week's more journeying northward, and the

rise and fall of the tide in the river proclaimed the near approach to the Indian Ocean. In the second week of picking up the Adelaide the party stood on the shores of the ocean itself. A space was cleared in the neighbourhood of the tallest palm-tree, which here plentifully marked the tropical character of the region. To its highest point was now affixed the Union Jack, and then the party celebrated the event by three cheers.

Mr. Stuart conducted his men safely back to the city of Adelaide in December of 1862. Thus was finally linked city and river, both having the same name, though so distantly apart, and thus designated by different discoverers under wholly different circumstances.

In a few months the telegraph men were on Mr. Stuart's track, cutting the poles and fixing the electric wire. To South Australia—as perhaps its central position warranted—fell the long coveted possession of this Overland telegraph route, with branches linking it with the various other Australian colonies. From Adelaide this main line strikes through the opened interior, reaching the north at Port Darwin, where, it may be recollected, the *Beagle* commenced her marine investigations, after landing Captain Grey on the coast. At Port Darwin the electric cable takes to the sea, availing

itself of a few small islets and sandbanks to land again on Java, until, finally, it reaches Ceylon, and places itself in connection with that vast system of telegraphy which has its centres now in the new world as well as in the old.

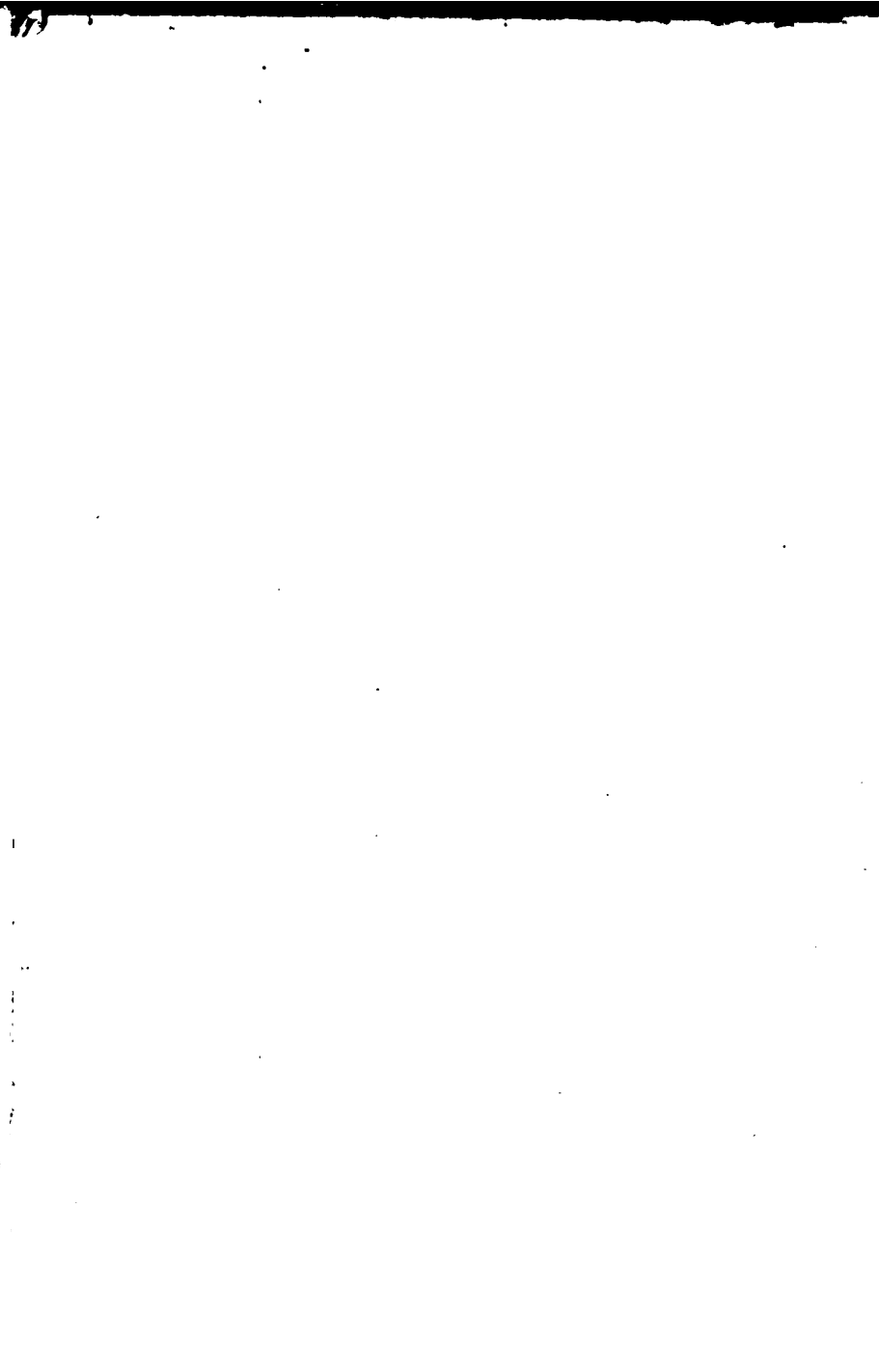
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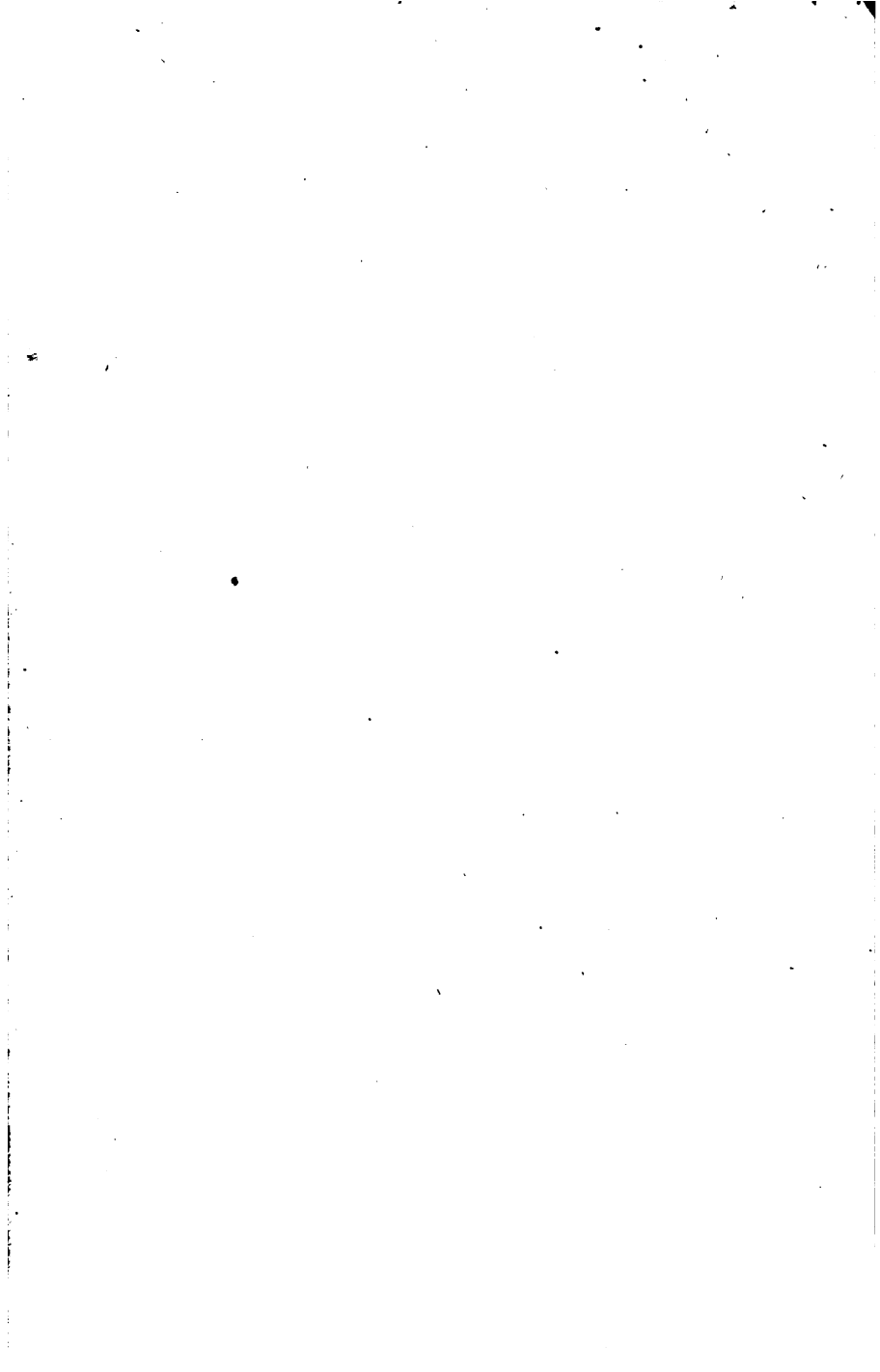


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